

Laura

A Portrait of Laura Secord



by Helen Caister Robinson

Canadian Heroines Series: 2

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Would there have been a Canada without Laura Secord?

This is the story of one of Canada's early heroines — the woman who overheard the occupying American forces talk of a surprise attack and who for more than 19 hours, walked through swamp and forest, risking exhaustion and discovery by the enemy Americans to warn the British troops at Beaver Dams. This information brought about the defeat and retreat of the Americans.

Laura Ingersoll Secord led a long life. Born at the beginning of the American revolution, in Massachusetts, she lived to see Confederation. In 1795, she came with her family to the newly created province of Ontario. Her father took land near what is now the town of Ingersoll. In 1798, she married James Secord, a merchant and reserve soldier, and went to live in the Niagara peninsula.

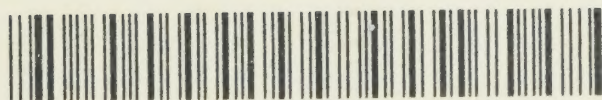
In the years following the war of 1812, the Secord family struggled through many lean years, trying to recreate the prosperity of their earlier days. James died in 1841, and her famous deed did not bring recognition until 1853 when a journalist interviewed her for an article about the war of 1812. This prominence brought her to the attention of the visiting Prince of Wales who rewarded her patriotism with a gift of £100.

Laura is the story of a heroine. But it is also a story of a pioneer woman — her pleasures, her challenges, her troubles.

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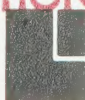
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Laura

to my sister Marguerite

Laura

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by Helen Caister Robinson

Canadian Heroine Series: 2

Toronto and Charlottetown

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J. Kirk Howard, Publisher

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Author's note

In this story of the life and times of Laura Ingersoll Second true incidents are supplemented, in certain instances, by fictional ones, and authentic historical figures mingle with imaginary characters to round out the life story of a woman who has become a legend in many homes. The historical figures and factual incidents will be easily recognizable to those readers familiar with the history of North America in the period 1775-1868.

Daniel Shays, mentioned in chapter 2, who organized and led Shay's Rebellion in Massachusetts in 1786-87, was an officer in the American army during the American War of Independence.

Thomas Ingersoll's home at the Thames stood on land that is now a part of the main street of the Town of Ingersoll, Ontario.

H.C.R.

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Home of Laura Ingersoll, Great Barrington, Mass. Built 1772.

Part 1

Massachusetts 1775-1795

Chapter 1

Prologue

During the year 1775 citizens of the British colony of Massachusetts lived in an atmosphere of anxiety and turmoil, as the War of Independence developed, and each man was forced to decide where his loyalty lay. Groups of rebel patriots became noticeably larger and more formidable throughout the autumn and early winter.

‘Military companies were learning the manual of

arms in all the village squares,' and hot-headed young men had begun to take the law into their own hands, to burn and pillage the property of those with known Loyalist leanings. Homeless Tories hurried to Boston where British troops were stationed.

Toward the end of that year, in the Town of Great Barrington, a daughter was born to a young merchant and his wife, Thomas and Betsy Ingersoll. Betsy was eighteen. The child was her firstborn, and when a midwife placed the baby in her arms memory of the prolonged, racking pain of her labour was dissipated in the new joy of motherhood.

Gravely concerned for the well-being of his gentle wife, twenty-six-year-old Thomas paid scant attention at first to the offspring he had fathered. He seated himself beside the cherrywood bed when finally permitted to see Betsy and patted her hand with gentle strokes. While he listened in helpless bewilderment, and some distaste, to the strengthening cries of the red-faced infant who lay beside her he endeavoured to assure Betsy that he was not disappointed because the baby was a girl instead of the son they had hoped for.

Mother and daughter lay quietly asleep when the town crier came down the street, his shrill voice summoning all able-bodied patriots to their daily arms drill. Hastily, Thomas placed his wife's hand beneath the coverlet. He kissed her forehead softly, drew a timidly exploring finger across the baby's nose, and with a murmured word to the housekeeper hurried away to the town common.

Great Barrington was situated close to the boundary which divided the colony of Massachusetts from that of New York and, as the tempo of war heightened, companies of militia moved along the rutted highway with increasing frequency. When those patriots who had practised the art of battle on the common were ready to join one of the companies, Thomas Ingersoll marched away with them.

He left his family and a thriving business with some reluctance, feeling no personal hatred toward the Tory neighbours whom he regarded as misguided in their poli-

tics. In common with other patriots he wished, primarily, to place his family and property beyond reach of the harsh British law. For the next several years war was to have first claim upon him. His wife and small daughter would see him only intermittently.

The Ingersoll house stood on the crest of five acres of land that sloped gently to the Housatonic River. For more than fifty years men who bore the name of Ingersoll had owned and lived on the property. The first small cottage, built by his grandfather in 1724 when he and a hundred other men founded the town of Great Barrington had been replaced by a more substantial structure. Although born in nearby Westfield, Thomas spent many happy childhood days in his grandfather's house. In 1774 he returned to Great Barrington to become established as a shopkeeper and live on the property he had inherited.

Larger than many in the town, the Ingersoll house was well-furnished and comfortable. A servants' wing and a fine new kitchen had recently been added, and the shed which for years had housed his grandfather's cow and horses, was replaced by a substantial barn and a carriage house. An elderly couple, servants of long standing, performed the menial tasks, cared for the animals, milked the cow.

Uncertain when he might return for a day, or a week, Betsy kept their home in immaculate order during the years of her husband's absence. With meticulous care she dusted the fragile bric-à-brac and polished the silver teapot. Her flower garden, in summer, was a mass of brightly coloured blossoms bordering on the path that led downhill to the river.

There, by the water's edge she often played with her small daughter. The child had been named Laura. When she reached the age of five her mother began to teach her to stitch a sampler, draw letters of the alphabet with hesitant fingers, and sing familiar ballads while she played an accompaniment on the rosewood spinet.

After the birth of her fourth child Betsy became ill and died within a few weeks. Laura was eight years old at that time. The War of Independence was over. Thomas

Ingersoll, who rose to the rank of major in the militia, had been appointed a magistrate in his district upon his return home, and was struggling to establish some semblance of law and order there in spite of the chaos that was rampant in the new republic.

Chapter 2

Tragedy for a Small Girl

She stood at the sitting-room window in the half light of a dreary February afternoon, a slender child with long blonde curls and a wistful face that was pressed close to one small pane. Lowering clouds whipped across the sky. Snow fell in thick flakes while her eyes strained to catch a last glimpse of the funeral procession that wound up the hill toward the winter burying house.

Four men carried the rough wooden box that had stood on a trestle in the frigidly cold summer parlour for the past five days. They held it high on their shoulders, and their boots sank deeply into the snow with each measured step. Behind them, accompanied by the congregational minister, her father walked slowly, his head bowed in grief. Her uncles, each with a band of crepe on his sleeve, and her aunts in their black mourning gloves trudged behind him, two by two. One or two friends followed, their immediate neighbours, the housekeeper Mary, the town midwife Ma Davis, and her son Joey, his face muffled in a heavy woollen scarf to shield it from the biting wind.

When she could no longer see the wooden box the little girl turned away from the window. Tears ran down her cheeks and she pressed trembling lips together, tightly, in an effort to control her weeping. "Poor Mama!

Poor, poor Mama!" she sobbed.

After a time she wiped the tears away with the hem of her muslin apron and slowly crossed the room to the rosewood spinet. Her fingers touched the ivory keys softly, making no sound. She bent her head and for a moment her cheek rested against the cool, polished wood.

In front of the instrument was the stool upon which her mother had so often sat to play the songs they both loved. She climbed up on the red velvet seat and reached out both hands toward the keyboard while her white-stockinged legs dangled above the rosy carpet. She discovered that when her eyes were closed tightly she could picture her mother quite clearly in poses that were familiar, as she had knelt in the flower garden, brushed her soft blonde hair or placed her father's slippers by the hearth. Reminded of her loss by the conjured images she began to cry again.

The fire had burned to a few red embers and it was almost dark in the room when the door opened and Mary, the elderly housekeeper, came in holding a lighted candle in her hand. She shivered a little and drew a shawl closer about her bent shoulders as she felt the chill of the room.

"There you are, Miss Laura," she said. "I've been looking everywhere for you. You oughtn't to sit here in the dark. 'Tis bad for you to brood, and will do your Mama no good now. Come! I've fixed you a nice cup of chocolate in the kitchen, and a bite to eat."

"Where is my father?" Laura asked as they went along the passageway.

"He's upstairs in the library with your Aunt Abigail and Uncle Jonathan. When we got back from the burying house the first thing I had to do was to make some hot rum to take the chill out of their bones. Hurry now, I'd like to get you children into your beds before I begin to cook supper for the Master and his guests."

The kitchen was warm when they entered it, bright with light from the oil lamp. Appetizing odours came from a pot that simmered on the hearth. At a low table two younger sisters, Mira and Elizabeth, sat over bowls of mush, giggling as the thick porridge dribbled down

their chins. The baby, Abigail, made low gurgling sounds as she lay in her cradle. Laura's face brightened and she ran to hug the infant. "May I hold her, please, Mary?" she asked.

"Not now, child. Come, drink your chocolate while 'tis hot."

Obediently, Laura sat down at the table beside her sisters and sniffed the warm drink. She nibbled at the corn bread spread with strawberry preserves, which Mary had placed in front of her, and pushed it aside. After two or three sips of the chocolate she left the table, went to sit beside the baby's cradle, and rocked it gently with her hand. "Mama said I must take good care of Abby," she announced as her voice broke into a sob.

"That you must," agreed Mary. "How we are to manage without the Mistress, I declare I'm sure I don't know."

Presently Aunt Abigail came into the kitchen to speak to the housekeeper about supper. When she noticed that Laura sat on the floor she scolded her sharply and insisted that she finish her bread and chocolate.

"You mustn't let the children take advantage," she said to Mary. "Teach them to obey and you'll save yourself a good deal of grief. My sister was too lax in disciplining her children."

When Mary protested she was silenced quickly.

"My husband and I will sleep here tonight," the aunt announced and added, "please see that the baby's clothes are in order. I shall be taking her home with me tomorrow."

"No, Aunt Abigail, you can't, you can't. I won't let you. She's our baby," Laura screamed, and the younger girls echoed her words "Can't, can't."

Sobbing, Laura ran out of the kitchen, up the stairs and into the library, where she threw herself against her father's chair, clinging to his knee. "Papa, please, please don't let Aunt Abigail take little Abby away. I'll look after her, I promised Mama I would. Please, Papa!"

He gathered her into his arms and his tears mingled with hers as he tried to explain that Mary could not possibly cook or care for all of them; that Abby would have a

good home with her aunt; her mother would have wanted the baby to be brought up by her sister Abigail. He began to wipe her tears away with his handkerchief. Unable to still the hard dry sobs that shook her small body, he tightened his arms about her and sat there in numb misery, holding her until she fell asleep.

The household settled into an orderly routine as the weeks went by. Every day that her skills as a midwife were not required Ma Davis came to help Mary with the cooking and the children's clothes. When old Joshua, Mary's husband, became too crippled by rheumatism to leave his bed, Ma's son Joey was pressed into service to milk the cow and do the outside chores.

Shocked and grief-stricken by Betsy's death, Thomas sat by the fire, evening after evening, his face set in a stern line, scarcely noticing the little girls who played near him until bedtime.

Laura, with a child's keen perception, was aware of his sorrow. In small ways she began to try to comfort him; placed his slippers beside the hearth, his pipe and tobacco close by, and a dish of rosy apples on the table near his favourite chair.

When he visited the nursery, as he did each night before retiring, he often found her awake in the darkness. She would reach her arms up when he bent over her, clasp them tightly about his neck, rub her cheek against his in an effort to make him understand that she wanted him to love her. Often her face was tear-wet against his when he held her to him tightly and kissed her forehead. Although few words were exchanged between them Laura was always comforted by these visits and Thomas, who at first sight of his infant offspring had thought her a poor substitute for the son he had expected, found singular consolation in his young daughter's tears, her obvious need of his love. A bond of deep affection began to be established between them.

Thomas remarried within a year of Betsy's death.

"It was to be expected," Ma Davis said. "No man should live alone, and him so young too. He must have a woman to give him comfort and help him bring up his children."

When Mary tried to silence her because the little girls were playing in the kitchen, Ma Davis said emphatically, "Let them hear. They'll be glad to have a mother again. You and I have kept them clean and fed them all these months, but we can't give them the love they need. Mrs. Mercy Smith is a fine woman. They say she's been all alone since her husband was killed in the war. She'll make the girls a good mother and Mr. Ingersoll a loving wife. There'll be happiness in the house again."

Ma Davis had spoken the truth. The new Mrs. Ingersoll brought great happiness to her new home. Two people sat by the fire in the evenings. There was a mother to care for the three girls, a mother whose capacity for loving reached beyond her husband to include his children.

Within a week Mira and Elizabeth were her adoring slaves. Laura, remembering Betsy and the funeral procession, was more reserved; she could not at first bring herself to call her stepmother Mama. The problem was solved when the new mother asked to be addressed as Mother Mercy. When she began to teach Laura to draw and perfect her fine sewing, and listened to the hesitant pronunciation of the words of her reading lesson, Laura too began to grow fond of Mother Mercy.

Increasingly, now, Thomas was required to be away from his home because of his magisterial appointment. In his absence Laura and Mother Mercy took long walks, with the younger girls romping beside them, and when Elizabeth's chubby legs could no longer support her Mother Mercy would carry the child home astride her shoulders. The children agreed that those were happy times.

When Thomas returned from presiding over the courts in other towns he was almost always depressed. There was so much discontent, he said, so much poverty. Men were losing their farms because they were unable to meet the mortgage payments.

Seated before the fire in the sitting room, he had been listening to the words of a poem that Laura had memorized to please him. Mercy occupied her favourite chair nearby, while Mira and Elizabeth played with a small kitten. Now he put the book aside and made a

space for Laura to sit next to him.

"There is more discontent, more dissatisfaction in the state than there was before we fought the war," he said, turning to Mercy. "Massachusetts is rapidly becoming bankrupt. It was a mistake for the government to permit the printing of paper money. Nothing has any real value now. The commodities we import are priced far too high for the average man, and the farmer can get nothing for his produce. He no longer bothers to harvest his crops. In my travels I've seen grain rotting in the fields, over-ripe apples left to waste on the trees. Twice in the past month men with guns and fowling pieces have tried to prevent the opening of the courts where I presided. It is not easy for me to rule that a man must lose his property because he has no money with which to make his payments, when I see the misery in his face and the despair in his eyes and know that he has been a thrifty, frugal citizen all his life. Daniel Shays has set himself up as a leader of the oppressed, and unless something is done to relieve this distressing situation I fear that fighting may break out at any time."

Thomas was too involved with the decisions he must make as a magistrate, Laura, too young to notice that Mercy was not well. Ma Davis thought she looked peaked, and remarked to Mary who was helping Laura hull wild strawberries in the kitchen, "Perhaps she is expecting."

Mary shook her head, placed a finger on her lips and glanced at Laura. "The Mistress would have told me," she said.

Chapter 3

A Second Stepmother

Laura was thirteen when Mother Mercy died, a victim of the dreaded lung disease, tuberculosis. Throughout the summer her energies had flagged. Her walks with the girls became shorter, less frequent, and in the autumn old Dr. Butler came to the house one morning to treat her persistent cough.

After a prolonged examination he had closed the door of her bedroom and followed Thomas into the library to pronounce his grim verdict. Laura, who had been dusting her father's books, was sent out of the room so that the men could talk, but not before she noticed the gravity of the Doctor's expression and her father's worried eyes.

She had gone along the passage, knocked at her mother's door, opened it, and entered the room. Mother Mercy's face was turned toward the wall, and when Laura approached the bed she could see that the tear-streaked cheeks were flushed with fever. Without being told she had sensed that her mother was gravely ill.

"I'm sorry she had to die," Ma Davis said as she drank tea in the kitchen with Mary and the girls after the funeral service. "She had everything to live for. Anyone could see how much she loved the Master, and she couldn't have cared more for the girls if they had been her own."

"She wanted so much to live until spring," Mary said. "I'm glad she got her wish. One day in the winter when I was fixing her bed she said to me, 'Mary, you know I'm going to die. Do you think I'm a foolish woman to be wishing I could wait long enough to see the trees turn green again?' "

The old housekeeper sighed. "It was snowing heavily that morning," she continued. "The wind was blowing a gale through the trees, and she coughed with each word she spoke. I thought as I tucked the blankets around her that it was most unlikely that she would live more than a few weeks. This afternoon as we followed her up the hill to the burying ground I noticed that beside the path there were clumps of those little pink wildflowers she was so fond of. Somehow, it was comforting to me to see them."

Within the year a new stepmother came to live in the Ingersoll house, accompanied by ten-year-old Harriet, her daughter by a former marriage. Mistress Sally was a bouncy, black-eyed young widow who brought fun and laughter back to the household that had become sombre in the months following Mother Mercy's death.

A passion for organization drove the new mistress to allot regular tasks to each of the Ingersoll girls as well as to her own daughter. Laura must learn to milk the cow. The younger girls would feed the chickens, gather the eggs. Although Mira was only ten and Elizabeth nine, their new mother thought it appropriate to warn them that they must become good housekeepers if they wished to catch husbands when they grew up.

Mary, who after Joshua's recent death seemed to depend more and more upon the assistance of Ma Davis, found it increasingly difficult to please the new mistress. "She makes my head spin round with her orders. The furniture must be rearranged, the curtains hung in a different fashion. I declare I can't remember all the things she expects me to do," she complained to Ma Davis over a cup of coffee in the kitchen.

Coffee had become so expensive that they rarely drank it except on an occasion like the present one when the Mistress had a visitor. Mary had made a generous

pot of the fragrant beverage and filled two large mugs, one each for Ma and herself, before pouring the remainder into the lustre coffee pot that stood on the silver tray beside its matching cream jug and cups.

"It must be hard for a third wife to feel comfortable in a house where two other mistresses have lived, using their possessions rather than her own," Ma Davis remarked with homely wisdom. "Without realizing that she has a need to put something of herself into the house if it is to be truly hers she believes that she has only to banish the ghosts of the former wives in order to be happy. You must bear with her, Mary. Be patient. By the time everything is rearranged to her liking I expect things will have settled down. If I'm not mistaken she'll be needing my services as a midwife in a few months."

To Laura, Mistress Sally seemed like an older sister. She liked her for the gaiety that so often bubbled into laughter, her quick decisions, her bright humour. She liked her new mother also because her father seemed happy again.

Under Mistress Sally's guidance Laura had begun to learn the intricacies of housekeeping which, in her new stepmother's view, were vastly more important than a knowledge of music or history. In spite of Mary's grumbled protests over the invasion of her kitchen, Laura enjoyed these practical lessons in cooking although she sorely missed Mother Mercy's skilful instruction in drawing.

It had been planned that as soon as she became fifteen she would enter a boarding school for young ladies in Boston, but when the time for her departure approached it was deemed unwise to send her so far away. Lawlessness and vandalism were still rampant in many parts of Massachusetts.

"You must wait another year," her father said. "In the meantime I shall help you as much as I can. There are several volumes of history in my library. I would like you to read them."

Before the year ended, conditions in Massachusetts had deteriorated to the degree that any plan to send Laura to boarding school had to be abandoned. Alarmed

by the boldness of gangs of plunderers who roamed the state to destroy property, often using violence against those who offered resistance, Thomas felt that he could not jeopardize his daughter's safety.

The fortune he had inherited dwindled alarmingly. He was unable to collect payment of his magistrate's fees except in commodities such as food for his table or grain for his horses. More and more often the idea of moving away from Massachusetts occurred to him. He began to envy the Loyalists who, when forced to leave their homes, had found refuge in Canada.

Mistress Sally was of the opinion that he had allowed himself to be influenced by one or two unpleasant incidents. The existing poor conditions would improve in time, she argued whenever Thomas endeavoured to share his worries with her. In his frustration he turned to Laura. She, alone, was aware of the real measure of her father's discontent.

When business made it necessary for him to go to the city of New York in the spring of 1792 it was to Laura that he gave instructions about precautions that must be taken to insure the safety of his family during his absence. On two separate occasions groups of strange men had come down the Housatonic River, drawn their canoes up on shore at the foot of his garden, sought overnight accommodation in his house, and upon departure forced him at gunpoint to give them money. Indians, whose tribal dress he did not recognize, often appeared at his door, in twos, threes or small bands, to beg food in threatening tones. Apprehensive of the intentions of all transient visitors and fearful for the safety of his household, Thomas was hesitant to leave his family unprotected for any lengthy period.

"You must not open the door to any person who isn't known to you," he instructed Laura. "I've arranged to have Ma Davis and Joey move into the servants' wing while I am away. The dog will sleep in the kitchen. His bark is ferocious enough to frighten off a prowler."

"But, Papa, Sir William is so large Mary doesn't like him to come into the kitchen, nor does Mistress Sally. He sniffs at Baby Charles when he is in his cradle, and I

think Mother is afraid he may hurt Charles.”

“I’ve talked with your mother about Sir William. She will see that my wishes are obeyed. The dog is a huge beast, I agree, but he is an excellent watchdog. I know your mother is concerned about Charles, and if it were possible to put off the journey to New York I would gladly do so. I count on you, Laura, to make certain that every safety measure is taken. You will be sure that the chains are in place on the doors each night, or whenever you see a stranger approaching. If you follow my instructions I think you will be safe enough.”

Chapter 4

A Man's Discontent

The Ingersoll family lingered around the dining table on the first day of Thomas's return, each one admiring the presents he had brought them. There was a length of green silk for Mistress Sally, two small volumes of *The Vicar of Wakefield* which Laura had begged him to bring her, new bonnets for the younger girls, woolly mittens for Baby Charles.

"A number of events occurred while I was in New York which may influence and indeed determine our plans for the future."

Thomas spoke slowly, his eyes on Mistress Sally's face. Laura's attention was caught by the seriousness of her father's tone. She looked up at him, noticed the gravity of his expression, glanced at her stepmother who seemed not to have heard his announcement.

"I had business at the Court House, as you know," Thomas continued, "and as I approached the building a large printed notice caught my eye. It was attached to the door, and when I stopped to read it I discovered that on the paper was a proclamation issued by the new Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada. To say the least I was astonished to find such a notice posted in a prominent place in the city of New York."

"What was it about, Papa?" Laura asked.

"I'm glad you asked that question, my dear. The pa-

per stated that blocks of land in the Province of Upper Canada would be available on easy terms to American settlers willing to take an oath of allegiance to King George of England."

"But, Papa, I thought the War of Independence was fought because people in the colonies wanted to escape the English King's unjust laws. Is that not so?"

"Quite so, Laura, but the war is over now. We've been an independent nation for almost ten years and yet conditions in Massachusetts, at least, have not improved as we hoped they would."

"Did you call on our friends, Ebenezer and Harriet Smith?" Mistress Sally asked, her fingers caressing the rich green fabric. Intent upon a plan for fashioning her gift into a new gown, she had paid little attention to the earlier conversation.

"Indeed, yes, and they immediately invited me to be their house guest during my stay in the city. When I asked Ebenezer if he could tell me the meaning of the notice I had read he replied that another friend was invited to dine with them that evening, one who had just come from Upper Canada. He said he would ask his guest to explain the matter to me when we met."

"Did you accept the Smiths' invitation?" Mistress Sally persisted. "I would have sent them a present for old time's sake had I known you would stay there – a cheese, a side of bacon, or some of Mary's wild strawberry preserves."

"Of course, my dear. It took very little persuasion on their part to make me accept. I moved my gear from the Black Horse Inn that very afternoon, and by the time I returned their other guest had arrived. When Ebenezer introduced him and I learned that he was none other than Captain Joseph Brant, I thought how fortunate I was to be there at the same time as he."

"Who is Captain Brant, Papa?" Mira asked.

"Joseph Brant is the Mohawk Indian chief who persuaded his people to fight on the side of the British during the War of Independence. He was a brilliant soldier then, and Ebenezer Smith contends that he is a clever strategist now. He was on his way to Philadelphia for a

conference with President Washington."

"An Indian! A friend of the Ebenezer Smiths! How extraordinary!" Mistress Sally exclaimed.

"A very good friend, I believe. Captain Brant has many such on this side of the border, some of whom are men in high positions. When our host mentioned that I had been inquiring about the proclamation I'd seen, Captain Brant went into great detail to explain it."

"Tell us what he said, Papa," Laura begged.

"It seems, dear, that the tremendous influx of Loyalists into Canada during and at the conclusion of the war has made it impossible for one man, stationed at the city of Quebec, to adequately govern the whole of the vast Quebec province. The British government has therefore recently enacted legislation which now separates Quebec into two provinces: Upper and Lower Canada. In Captain Brant's view, Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe, who is at the head of the government in Upper Canada, is a forward-looking man who feels that his province must be populated to a much larger extent than it is at present. Much of the land must be cleared, farms cultivated, and communities established, if Upper Canada is to thrive and develop. The Captain stated that there are extensive stretches of territory in Upper Canada that are virtually uninhabited. It is to these areas that Colonel Simcoe hopes to attract American settlers."

Mistress Sally's hand suddenly ceased to stroke the length of silk. "What interest can you possibly have in land situated so far away from Massachusetts?" she asked.

"I have a very considerable interest, my dear," Thomas replied. "I intend to make a journey to Upper Canada very soon in order to see for myself whether or not this offer is valid."

"How can you be sure you will return from such a remote and wild country? How can you contemplate a second long absence when you know I'm expecting another child within a few months?" There was reproach in Mistress Sally's tones.

"All being well, I shall be back before that event occurs," Thomas said. "My dear, I must go. There is no

longer any future for us in Massachusetts. You are as aware of that as I am. For some time, as you know, I've been of the opinion that we should move away from Great Barrington before conditions deteriorate further. Until lawlessness and vandalism are banished from the state there is no real opportunity here for either prosperity or happiness. The idea of settling in Upper Canada appeals to me." He paused a moment and then added, thoughtfully, "The time has come to think of making a new life in a land where we can be assured that the stranger who enters our home is a law-abiding citizen, not a ruffian."

It was Laura who opened the door, a few weeks later, to a tall stranger who had tethered his horse at the gate. She watched his approach, his head held high, a gaunt man in Indian dress, beaded moccasins on his feet. His right leg dragged slightly as he walked. She observed his piercing eyes, the stern countenance that broke into a smile when she greeted him. "You must be Captain Brant," she said when he inquired for her father. "He told us to expect you. Please come in. He is in the library."

Long after the younger children had gone to their beds, Laura and Mistress Sally lingered before the fire in the sitting room to listen to the conversation of the two men. "How kind of him to offer to accompany Papa to Upper Canada!" Laura whispered to her stepmother. "Surely you can have no fears for my father's safety now."

Mary and Ma Davis were at breakfast when Laura brought Baby Charles into the kitchen the following morning. The two men had ridden off at daybreak. Mary said she had cooked them a meal and given them food for the journey.

"I haven't seen the Master as happy in many a day, laughing and joking, he was, while they ate their breakfast. 'Mary,' he said to me, 'I'm going to Upper Canada with Captain Brant. If the land is as rich and fertile as I'm led to believe it is we shall all be moving there when I return, you too, if you wish it.' He bade me take good care of the Mistress until he got back."

"And will you go with them, Mary, if the family moves to Upper Canada?" Ma Davis asked.

"I declare I don't know. 'Tis a long journey for one as old as I am, but on the other hand, what would I be doing here without the Master and his family? Where would I live? I've never worked for anyone except the Ingersolls, first for his grandparents, and then for Mr. Thomas. My Joshua died in their service, and I've always expected I would do the same, although I thought it would be here in this house."

"Come now," Ma said, "that's no way for you to talk. You've got years of living ahead of you. Of course you must go to Canada if the Master has set his mind on it. I'd like to have your chance, and so would Joey."

"We must wait to see what decision my father will make when he returns," Laura said as she arranged Mistress Sally's breakfast tray. "If he is determined to move to Upper Canada he may ask both you and Joey to accompany us."

Thomas was absent for a longer period than he had anticipated. By the time he returned Charles was able to toddle about on chubby legs, and the cradle in the kitchen was occupied by Charlotte, the newest member of the family.

"Praise be," exclaimed Mary, who was the first to see him dismount from his horse and lead the animal toward the barn. "Now the Mistress can stop her fretting, although I declare I sometimes think she does enjoy being miserable."

Ma Davis smiled knowingly as she bent to lift the baby from the cradle. "It will be good to have the Master at home again," she said, and wondered how long she and Joey would be allowed to stay on in the servants' wing. Her quarters were very comfortable and she had grown attached to the Ingersoll family.

Chapter 5

Long Journey to a New Land

Gathered around the fire in the library, Mistress Sally and the four girls — Elizabeth, Mira, Harriet, and Laura — listened with varied feelings to the announcement that their father intended to leave Great Barrington.

“We must begin now to make preparations for the journey,” Thomas said. “I would like to be ready to move to Upper Canada as soon as I can dispose of my property here. I have acted upon Captain Brant’s advice and made application to the lieutenant-governor of the province for a block of land which fronts on the Thames River, where the soil is reputed to be unusually fertile.”

“Oh, Tom, how could you! We shall never see our friends again.” Mistress Sally’s gasp of consternation ended in a sob, as Thomas bent over her chair and took a linen handkerchief from his pocket to wipe her sudden tears.

“Please don’t cry, my dear,” he begged. “I know it must make you sad to think of moving to a strange country. It is true the section of land I’ve chosen is in a virtually uninhabited wilderness, but we would soon be joined by other families. Men in authority at Newark have assured me that Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe is prepared

to offer land to at least a thousand American settlers. And I have given my word that within seven years a minimum of forty families, whom I intend to recommend, will move to Upper Canada to settle on the land I have been granted. Before many months have passed I'm certain we shall have neighbours within a few miles of us."

He sat down on the sofa beside Mistress Sally, placed an arm about her shoulders, and held her hand in his as he continued to talk about his experiences in Upper Canada. Captain Brant had helped him select a choice property on which there was already a small clearing formerly used by the Indians as a camping ground. Attention to the details of registration had caused the delay in his return. Preparation of the papers had taken a considerably longer period of time than he had anticipated. After waiting at Newark for several weeks he learned that it would be impossible for him to obtain a legal deed to the property he had chosen until such time as the families for whom he had vouched were settled on the two-hundred-acre farms allotted to them. During this period he had dined at the homes of several prominent men and upon the advice of one had purchased a tavern at The Landing, persuading the man from whom he had bought it to continue its operation. Income from the tavern would be most acceptable until such time as his land became productive. He had been invited to a ball at Fort Niagara where he met Joseph Brant's sister Molly, who was the widow of Sir William Johnson. Filled with admiration for this proud matron whom the officers seemed to hold in high regard, he had talked with her at length while he watched her daughters dance the schottische and polka with more rhythm and grace than some of the English ladies who mingled with them on the polished floor of the ballroom.

Mistress Sally listened in silence for a time and then, with a hint of anger in her voice, interrupted him. "I can't see why we need go so far away. Will you be willing to swear allegiance to the King of England, you who fought for independence because you were out of sympathy with the British laws? I should think you would be

afraid that a similar situation might develop in Upper Canada."

"That is a risk we shall have to take, Sally," Thomas replied. "Do you think it will be easy for me to give up the home I've lived in for twenty years, the property that was my grandfather's? Believe me, it will not. With all my heart I wish we need not move from Massachusetts. If I could see any alternative to our present plan I assure you we wouldn't leave Great Barrington."

More than a year elapsed before a reliable purchaser was found for the Ingersoll property. In the meantime another baby daughter, Appolonia, had usurped Charlotte's place in the cradle.

While the older girls packed china and silver, Mistress Sally anxiously contemplated the hazards involved in making the long journey with three children under the age of five and another expected. She confided the news of her condition to Laura, as her stepdaughter wrapped Betsy's lustre coffee pot in the folds of one of her gowns for safekeeping during the journey.

"I shall die, I know I shall die," Mistress Sally wailed.

Laura regarded her mother with eyes that were filled with concern. "Hush, Mama. You mustn't say that. I'll ask Father to take Ma Davis with us. You'll feel safe if you know Ma is on hand to deliver the baby." She wiped the tears from the older woman's eyes. "You're not to worry about anything. You know my sisters and I will care for the little ones."

"I wish we need not go, Laura. I've no desire to leave Great Barrington and move to the kind of place your father describes. In Upper Canada we shall be so far removed from everything I've ever cared about. I just can't bear to think of it. In spite of what your father has said I believe conditions in Massachusetts will improve if we can wait for a year or two. Do you want to leave our home, truly?"

"Yes, I think so." Laura's tone was hesitant. "I shall miss this house, of course, the garden and the river, but

when I see how much happier Papa seems to be since he has made his decision to move I think it must be a good thing to do. I'm sure we'll find friends in Canada."

The last piece of china, with the ornaments and bric-à-brac that had stood on the carved rosewood whatnot in the sitting room, were securely packed among the blankets and the silver hidden safely in a barrel before Laura and her sisters set to work to prepare the food that must be taken with them.

Every detail had been attended to. The boxes, barrels, and food hampers were stowed in the waiting cart and Mistress Sally with her small children ensconced in a hired carriage with the older girls when they at last set out on their journey. Thomas followed the carriage on horseback, while Mary and Ma Davis rode ahead in a cart driven by Joey. The furniture they would need in their new home had been sent on ahead of them via the overland Mohawk Trail to Niagara.

Thomas had drawn a makeshift map on a sheet of writing paper to explain the route they would follow. The initial leg of the trip would take them to a point on the Hudson River where small boats had been engaged to transport the family and their baggage up the Hudson to Albany.

"We shall travel a hundred miles along the Mohawk River from Albany in the small craft, and then carry the boats and baggage over a portage from the Mohawk into a narrow stream called Norner Creek," he said. "We must follow the creek to Oneida Lake, cross the lake and go down the Oswego River to the Town of Oswego on Lake Ontario."

The cramped area of the small boats caused everyone a good deal of discomfort. The children became irritable, taxing the patience of the older girls. When Mistress Sally wept, was ill or depressed, small lines of worry appeared on her husband's face. At Albany they were forced to rest for several days until the invalid's health had improved. Ma Davis administered potions of her own concoction to the patient. Laura stroked her

stepmother's forehead while Thomas paced anxiously back and forth outside the lodging house. At Oswego they rested again. Here the small boats were abandoned, the boatmen paid off, and passage was booked on a sailing ship bound for Burlington Bay.

The vessel was less than three hours out of Oswego when a violent electrical storm swept the lake. High winds tossed the ship about, causing the children and their parents to be attacked by seasickness. The storm was followed by a period of windless calm during which the ship drifted with slackened sails and made no progress toward its destination. Aloft, sailors scanned the horizon anxiously for signs of a change in weather, while food supplies dwindled and had to be rationed. Confined to the restricted quarters of the cabin, Mistress Sally's small children became fretful and demanded constant attention from the older girls.

The first breeze brought a gale of such violence that the captain was forced to seek shelter for his vessel in a quiet bay where some of the sailors struggled ashore in search of food. The gale had subsided to a gentle breeze before they returned carrying meat, bread, and fresh milk obtained from an isolated settler whose farm they were fortunate enough to find. Instilled with new energy by the taste of fresh milk and bread, everyone seemed to relax. Smiling, Laura declared that it was a good omen to have found a friend in Upper Canada so quickly, while the knowledge that they were nearing the end of their journey was of great comfort to Mistress Sally.

Before they sailed out of the sheltered bay toward Burlington, her tears had dried and she seemed much improved in health. Her emotional distress had vanished and signs of her former cheerfulness were evident. Lightheartedly, the Ingersoll girls sang their favourite ballads as they endeavoured to amuse the small children.

Laura noticed that the worry lines had disappeared from her father's face when they stood together on deck to watch fleecy clouds hurry across the blue sky while a stiff breeze drove them toward Burlington Bay; she heard his sigh of relief as the landing place came into

view.

"Thank God, we have weathered the journey," he said.

Laura, remembering the violent attacks of seasickness she had suffered, looked up at him and smiled as she echoed his words. "Yes, Papa, Thank God, indeed."

Upon landing, Thomas went immediately to engage rooms at the village inn, while the others remained on the ship, and when he returned the innkeeper accompanied him.

"My dear, I've made arrangements for you to remain at Burlington for the present," he said in answer to the question in Mistress Sally's eyes. "Ma Davis insists that you must rest before going farther and I agree. Ma will take good care of you. Harriet and Elizabeth will remain, Mira too, if you like, to look after the babies. In the meantime Laura and I will go on to the Thames to make certain that our furniture has arrived and our house ready for occupancy. Two of Captain Brant's men are waiting to act as guides. I've spoken for horses. We shall leave early in the morning. Joey will drive the cart I've hired to transport our baggage, and Mary will ride with him. The trail from Burlington to Fort Detroit passes scarcely five miles from the property I've chosen, and is quite passable for a cart or wagon. When we have put everything in order I shall return for you."

To Laura, the long tedious journey to Oswego had seemed like a bad dream from which she would awaken to find herself at home in Great Barrington. The voyage across Lake Ontario and the bouts of seasickness had been a nightmare to be forgotten as quickly as possible. Now, while they followed the creaking baggage cart over the wooded trail, she listened to sounds of birdsong and observed brilliant summer flowers that grew beside the narrow road. The sun shone. The sky above them was deep blue. From the branch of a fallen tree a chipmunk chattered to her noisily. A fawn, startled by the sound of horses' hoofs, leaped from his feeding place beside the trail to peer at her from a sheltering tree. She paused to watch his bright, curious eyes, and laughed in sheer, youthful enjoyment of the simple adventures of the jour-

ney.

When they reached the Thames River their guides led them westward along a narrow wooded path that followed the stream until they came to the small clearing that had been an Indian camping ground. Laura stifled an exclamation of dismay at the sight of the house that was to be their home. Built of unpeeled logs, the cabin seemed small and rudely built by comparison with the Great Barrington house. Her eyes strayed to the block of wood that served as a step at the front door and the windows which as yet were without panes of glass. She thought of Mistress Sally, her love of comfortable living, and speculated whether her stepmother could be happy in this new home.

"You must not judge the house by its present appearance," her father warned, sensing her astonishment. "There will be a porch and adequate steps leading to the door to replace this makeshift stoop. A kitchen is to be erected at the rear, and I've asked Captain Brant's men to see that a separate cabin is built as quickly as possible. At the time the arrangements were made and the measurements calculated for the house, I was uncertain whether or not Mary would accompany us, nor did I anticipate that Ma Davis and Joey would come to Upper Canada. We shall have to add another wing as soon as it is possible to do so."

"I was thinking of Mama. You know how much she loved our spacious home at Great Barrington."

"It is a great upheaval for your mother, I know, and it will be more difficult for her to adjust to our new surroundings than for either you or your sisters. I would give a great deal to bring the sparkle back to her eyes and know that she, and indeed all of you, would be happy here. You must help me, Laura."

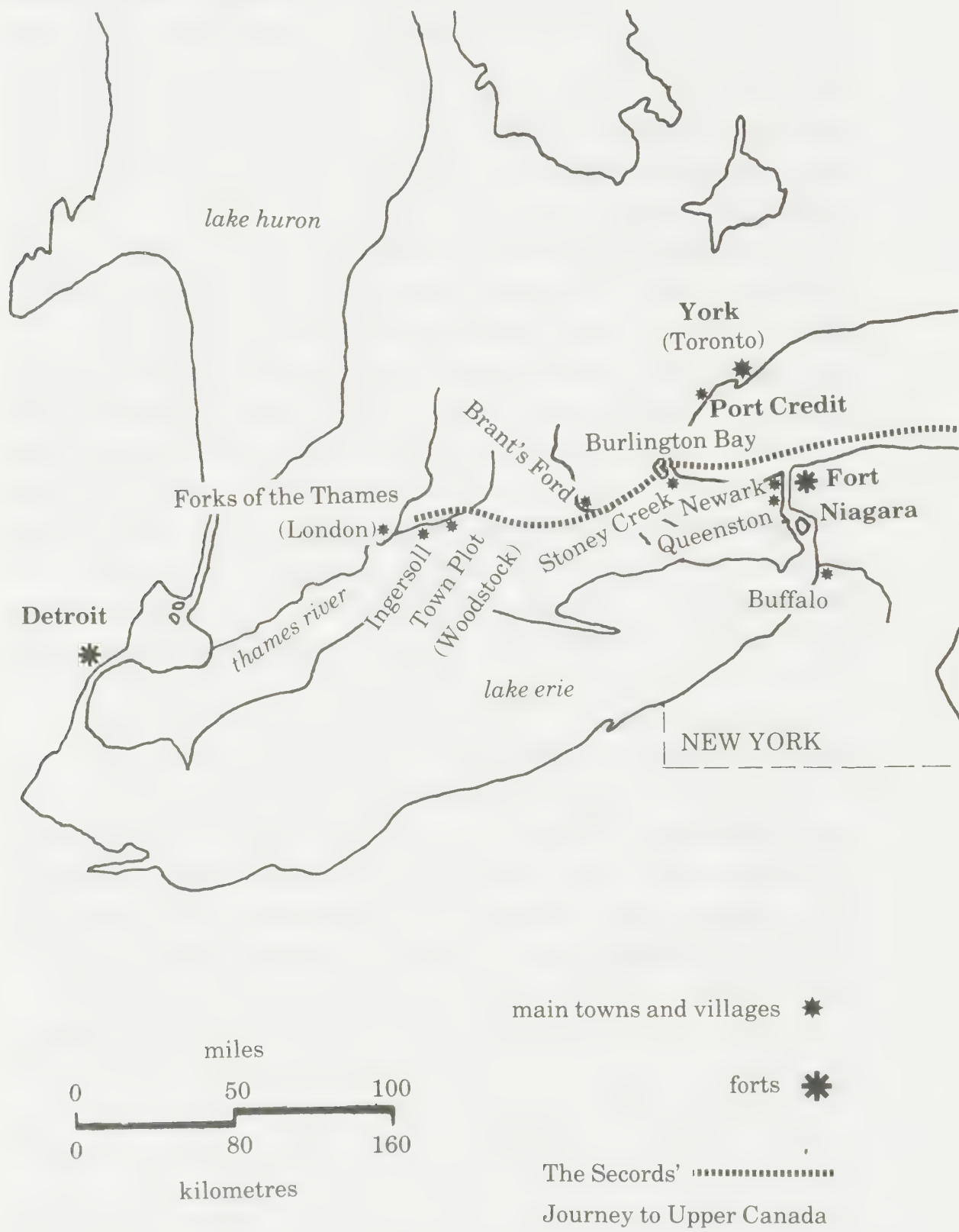
"If you are content, Papa, I'm sure we shall be also."

She watched him walk toward the river bank where the Indian guides had caught a fish, and were preparing to cook it over a small fire. "Poor Papa," she sighed. "I wish he need not feel so worried about Mama."

While she helped Mary to unpack boxes and barrels, she wondered, curiously, where they would purchase

cloth for their gowns, or wool with which to make stockings; how they would obtain such staples as sugar and coffee and whether the price of tea would be less prohibitive in Upper Canada.

Main Place Names in the Story





Part 2

The Wildernees of Upper Canada 1795-1812

Chapter 6

Along the Thames

During the years immediately following the arrival of the Ingersolls at the Thames River, men emigrated to Upper Canada from Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and New York to take up land at the invitation of Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe, and a number, including certain families sponsored by Thomas, settled in the upper Thames valley. Those whose farms were within five, ten,

or twenty miles of the Ingersoll property were regarded as neighbours by them.

With Joey's assistance Laura's father had begun to clear his acreage, and the newcomers followed his example. They felled saplings and burned low shrubbery and underbrush. Although none among them possessed a saw of sufficient size or strength to cut through the burly trunks of the tall elms and maples that must be removed to make way for the crops they intended to sow, these men refused to be discouraged.

Thomas and Joey, at the suggestion of their Mohawk friends, had used axes to girdle the bark of the mammoth oaks and elms that must be felled, assured that when thus ringed the trees would die. They could be toppled easily then, the Indians informed them. Their new neighbours followed the same pattern. With a vision of well-cultivated acres set firmly in his mind, fields of golden wheat, tall corn unmarred by ugly stumps, each man was content in the meantime to cultivate as much soil as possible between the dying trees. Hoes, rakes, and all available hand tools were used. Labour, as well as implements, was shared by all, and while one assisted the other lasting friendships were formed among them.

Thomas's fears that his wife might be unhappy in their new home had been needless. After the birth of her son, Thomas Junior, Mistress Sally's health improved. Her cheerfulness returned, and with it her talent for organization.

The log which in the beginning had served as a step to the front door was, under her direction, replaced by a well-built stoop. The lean-to kitchen had been completed, an extra cabin erected. Her practical suggestions to the wives of other settlers were met usually with grateful enthusiasm and she quickly became an authority on domestic matters.

"I declare," Ma Davis remarked to Laura, "the Mistress is a changed woman. Although she would be the last to admit such a thing I'm sure it was good for her to leave Great Barrington. Your father's house was too full of reminders that she isn't the first Mrs. Ingersoll. I doubt she ever felt really comfortable there in spite of

her liking for its roominess and grand furnishings. Here, she is mistress of a house that was built for her, and there are no ghosts of former wives to fret her. She has come into her own now."

They stood outside the lean-to kitchen watching a leg of venison turn slowly on an iron spit that had been slung over a bed of glowing coals. Now and then the wood sputtered into a wavering flame as the succulent meat juices dripped into the fire.

"You've noticed the change too," Laura exclaimed. "My mother is happier here, isn't she, and my father also." She wrinkled her nose appreciatively as she sniffed the rich odour of roasting meat. In a moment she moved away from the spit and went to test the loaves of bread that were being baked to a golden-brown texture in the outdoor oven.

Before many months passed Thomas Ingersoll discovered that he had less and less time to devote to the development of his property. It had been necessary for him to state his former occupations when making application for land at the time of his first visit to Upper Canada. Now, as the population of the province increased, it became imperative that the Lieutenant-Governor appoint a magistrate to the Western District. Thomas, whose education and magisterial experience were in his favour, was chosen to fill that office. Men rode many long miles to his door in order to consult him, and when his appointment became known young people began to seek his services as a Justice of the Peace.

He was absent on an errand to a neighbour when the first young couple came to his house to be married. The youthful bridegroom spoke with shy insistence when Laura answered his knock at the door. They had ridden a long distance, he said, and hoped the magistrate could marry them immediately so that they might ride as far as the Inn at Town Plot before nightfall.

At her invitation they waited in the sitting room for her father's return, and when Mistress Sally learned that they wished to be married she said they must not worry about getting to the inn. She would be glad to give them a room for the night if her husband were detained

longer than was expected. In a flurry of romantic excitement she instructed Mary and Ma Davis to prepare a simple bridal repast and lay the table with the best cloth and linen napkins. She and Laura would act as witnesses, she said.

Laura had hurried away to gather wildflowers with which to decorate the table, and when she returned there was a bouquet of wood violets in her hand for the bride. Pretty, shy, scarcely seventeen, the young girl began to cry when the blossoms were thrust into her hand. Uncertain what to do, Laura called Mistress Sally and stood helplessly by while her stepmother swept the girl into affectionate arms, murmuring soft incoherent sounds that seemed to quiet the sobs. She watched in admiration as Mistress Sally wiped away the bride's tears, straightened the collar of her dress, patted her hand encouragingly, and assured her that marriage was a happy estate. Laura's astonishment was complete when she saw tears in her stepmother's eyes as she placed an arm around the girl's waist and led her to the young man who stood by the hearth waiting for Thomas to return. She had not previously seen her stepmother display so much warmth and concerned affection for a stranger. A feeling of admiration and pride welled in her heart. The Ingersoll family stood in silence, all eyes fixed on the bridal pair, while the solemn words were spoken. Laura watched the young man bend to kiss his bride and experienced a strange, unexplained feeling that was almost envy. Although she was twenty-one she had as yet met no young man to whom she felt attracted. While she signed her name as witness to the certificate of marriage she wondered, fleetingly, what it would be like to fall in love. Stirred by the bridegroom's obvious adoration of his young wife, she began to speculate about herself. Was she pretty? Would a man find her pleasing? Was she too shy, too quiet to claim male attention? Her reverie was interrupted when her father's hand was placed on her shoulder. "I must give the bride her marriage lines," he said, smiling as he took the paper from her fingers.

"I declare I can't understand these Canadian customs," Mary said as she, Ma Davis, and the girls cleared

the dining table after the wedding feast had been eaten. "The Master is a magistrate, not a clergyman. How can it be right for him to marry two people by reading a few words out of a book? The marriage service was meant to be performed in church by a man of God."

"Tis only natural that young people who fall in love want to get married," Ma Davis remarked. "If there are no churches near at hand, no clergymen, what are they to do? I wonder if there are any churches in Upper Canada!" she glanced at Laura, inquiringly. "Do you know, Miss Laura?"

"I believe there is a resident clergyman at Fort Niagara, and the Mohawk Indians have a chapel at Brant's Ford, although they have no missionary to preach to them. My father tells me there is a law in Upper Canada which states that a man and woman who wish to marry must, if they live within eighteen miles of a church that sustains an Anglican missionary, say their vows before him. If they reside beyond the designated mileage it is permissible for them to be married by a Justice of the Peace."

"Eighteen miles!" Ma Davis repeated the words thoughtfully. "I expect the Master will be called upon many times to do what he did today. If the Mistress intends to spread a bridal supper for every young couple who come here to be married we'd best be prepared, Mary."

Laura smiled as she gathered the linen napkins into a neat pile and helped Ma Davis fold the fine white cloth. "I think that would be wise," she agreed. "My father believes that he and other justices of the peace will be asked to perform the wedding ceremony for many young people. There are so few churches and such a scarcity of clergymen in Upper Canada that for some time to come it will be necessary for representatives of the law as well as men of the cloth to read the marriage service."

Chapter 7

Romance and Marriage

On an afternoon in late June when the wild strawberries were ripening in abundance Laura knelt at the edge of the clearing to gather them for the preserves that must be made. At the sound of horses' hoofs she looked up from her task and saw two strange men dismount near the door of the log house. She watched them tether their mounts to a tree and saw the younger of the pair walk toward her, picking his way carefully among the ribbons of green corn that sprouted between the tree stumps. She observed his handsome face, long black sideburns, the lean youthfulness of his tall frame. When he reached her side he removed his high-crowned riding hat. His blue eyes smiled into her brown ones as he inquired for her father, stating that he and his companion had travelled from the Niagara peninsula to consult with Magistrate Ingersoll.

"You are fortunate to have arrived today. My father has returned from the Forks of the Thames just an hour ago. Come with me. I'll take you to him," she said.

He bent to help her rise from the kneeling position, and a pleasant sensation of warmth crept over her as their hands touched. In order to hide a sudden embarrassment she turned to pick up the pot of berries, and as he took it from her his fingers touched hers again. "The strawberries are the sweetest of all the small fruits," he

said, and placed one in his mouth.

Laura felt the blood flush her cheeks as she smiled shyly, in acquiescence, and led the way toward the house. The strangers introduced themselves to Magistrate Ingersoll as James Secord and his son James. When they began to discuss their business Laura hurried away to help Mary with preparations for supper.

There was no one in the kitchen when she entered it. Freshly baked loaves of bread had been set to cool on the pine table. A stone crock of strawberry preserves stood on a nearby shelf. Laura placed her pot of berries beside it. Some of the fruit would do nicely for dessert with slices of Mary's fresh bread, she decided.

Through the open door she could see the old housekeeper sitting at the end of the wash bench, asleep in the warm sunshine. When Laura went to rouse her she started up suddenly, exclaiming, "What is it, Miss Betsy?"

"Wake up, Mary. You've been dreaming. I'm not Miss Betsy." She placed a hand on the old woman's arm and led her into the kitchen. "There will be two guests for supper, two gentlemen who've come a long distance to see my father. They will likely stay the night," she said.

Mary's old eyes blinked again and again as she searched Laura's face. "I do declare, Miss Laura, you look more and more like your mother every day. She was such a pretty lady, with pink cheeks and pale brown hair like yours. When you woke me up just now I was sure you were Miss Betsy."

"Thank you," Laura said, pleased by the subtle compliment. "I often think of my gentle mother although I don't remember her appearance very clearly now."

"I wish Ma Davis was here to help with supper," Mary said.

"You and I will manage quite nicely by ourselves," Laura replied as she moved about the kitchen. "Ma will be busy enough at the Hitchcocks today."

The only recognized midwife in the area, Ma made herself available to all who required her skills. Early that morning big Jim Hitchcock, who lived ten miles down the trail, had come for her. It was his wife's time,

he said, and she had asked him to hurry.

Ma had packed her portmanteau immediately, and when she was ready to climb into Jim's cart Mistress Sally had run out of the house and got in beside them. "I promised Katie Hitchcock I'd look after her little girls," she had called to Laura as Jim slapped the reins across the backs of the horses and the cart moved away.

Supper was a gay meal. Conversation flowed freely. Jim Hitchcock's younger brother, Julius, came in as it was being served to tell them that the baby had arrived; that Mistress Sally intended to stay with his sister-in-law until she was able to be up and about again; Ma Davis would return in the morning.

An admirer of seventeen-year old Mira, Jock, as he was known to his friends, readily accepted her father's invitation to supper. A place was made for him at the table, and he eased a chair between Mira and Elizabeth.

Thomas served pink slices of ham topped with Mary's cream gravy, and Elizabeth handed the plates round the table while the visitors talked about the social life at Newark, the changes which had taken place since the seat of government was removed to York.

Laura occupied Mistress Sally's chair, poured coffee, offered strawberries for dessert, and listened quietly to the pleasant chatter. When the younger children came in to say goodnight, and in their mother's absence begged to be allowed to stay, she patted Charlotte's curly head. "If you promise to be as quiet as mice you may remain for half an hour," she said.

At the end of the meal the two older men retired to the stoop to smoke a pipe. Harriet and Elizabeth hurried the children off to bed while Laura cleared the dining table and helped Mira carry the dishes into the kitchen. When Mary refused their further offers of assistance Mira and Jock went out, hand in hand, to carry a bucket of water to his horse.

"There will be a full moon tonight, Miss Laura. Shall we watch it rise with your sister and her young man?" James Secord was smiling down at her. Laura's heart skipped a beat and she felt her cheeks grow warm. What was it about this stranger, she wondered, that stir-

red her emotions, made her feel shy, unpoised, at a loss for words. Impatient with herself, she nodded silently and followed him through the kitchen door into the warm June night.

Dimly they could make out two figures by a pile of logs that stood ready cut for winter use, and in the gathering darkness heard the young girl's soft laughter ring out happily.

"Why can't I be as self-possessed as Mira?" Laura thought, enviously.

When they reached the others all four sat down together on one of the logs, their backs supported by the pile behind them; and watched the moon come up over the distant edge of the forest in a bright yellow disc that streaked the river with gold and turned the darkness into a pale twilight. The young men talked of their plans for the future while the girls listened in silence.

James Secord told them he had decided to become a merchant because he felt certain the opportunities in that field would be tremendous when the population of Upper Canada increased, as it was bound to do. He intended to purchase a house and some property at St. David's in the Niagara peninsula, where he would open a general store. It was in connection with this business transaction that he and his father had come to see Thomas Ingersoll.

When Jock Hitchcock rose to take his leave the moon was high in the sky. "It was good to talk with you," he said, holding out his hand to James. "There are so few opportunities for an isolated farmer to learn what is happening in other parts of the country. I hope the situation will improve as the population increases."

With arms linked, he and Mira sauntered toward the tree where his horse was tethered, while Laura and James turned to walk toward the house. They paused at the front stoop, deserted now by the older men, and James said, "Let's sit here until your sister has said goodnight to Jock. It is very obvious that they are fond of each other."

"Jock is just a neighbour. The thought of him being in love with Mira has never occurred to me. She seems so

young to us, and yet my mother was just seventeen when she and my father were married."

Suddenly Laura began to talk about her mother, the loneliness she had felt when Betsy died and her baby sister was taken away by her aunt. She no longer felt shy or at a loss for words. She spoke of her life at Great Barrington, her father's disenchantment with the state of affairs in Massachusetts, their journey to Upper Canada.

In turn, James talked about his family, his childhood. At the age of two he had come to Fort Niagara with his mother during the early stages of the War of Independence. His mother and four other women had made the hazardous journey together, bringing with them thirty-one children in all. His family were ardent Loyalists, he said. His father and two older brothers had joined Butler's Rangers, under Colonel John Butler, who was their neighbour in the colony of New York prior to the war. He had grown up in the Niagara peninsula where a number of Loyalist families were making a good life for themselves. In the beginning there was only forest where prosperous farms had now been developed. A number of villages had sprung up, and many of the original log cabins were being replaced by houses of brick or fieldstone. He predicted that the Western District would gradually develop in a similar manner.

Several weeks later young James Secord returned for further discussions with Laura's father and for the better part of a week was a guest in the Ingersoll house. The September days were growing shorter. Darkness closed in early, and the family gathered around the sitting room fire during the evenings to listen to the stories James told. He had been to York, the new capital of Upper Canada, which he described as a dull, muddy town. The present lieutenant-governor did not, in his view, have the vision of Colonel Simcoe and it was thought that he would soon be replaced. In answer to Mistress Sally's query about the fashions there he attempted to describe the gowns of the ladies at York and was greeted by gales of girlish laughter from her daughters.

The days passed quickly, and when James had gone Mistress Sally speculated about his possible interest in

one of the girls. "I should think he would be attracted to Mira" she said to her husband. "Laura would probably make him the best wife; she is closer to his age and is a gentle, affectionate girl, but she is such a quiet mouse that young men are apt to overlook her good qualities."

"James Secord seems to be a fine young man and will, I think, make a success of his business," Thomas remarked. "If he is interested in either of our daughters I shall be glad to welcome him as a son-in-law. However, I'm afraid you're making plans too early, my dear. I think he is more concerned for the moment about setting up his shop than he is with finding a wife. You had best put those romantic notions out of your head."

Throughout the weeks of autumn Laura thought frequently of the young man who had stirred a strange exciting emotion within her each time they were together and she wondered whether he would come again. There had been little opportunity for them to talk alone during his last visit. He had not seemed to seek her out especially, although she was often aware of his gaze as she sat with the others around the fire. She was uncertain of her own feelings. He was the first young man who had intrigued her interest, and although he seemed to be attracted to her at their first meeting she could not permit herself to think of him as more than a casual acquaintance until he gave some further indication of his feelings. When the weeks of winter slipped by without word from him any romantic thoughts she had harboured were banished to a far corner of her mind. She had been mistaken, she told herself. James Secord's interest in her was merely that of a well-mannered guest toward the daughter of his host. It was unlikely that she would see him again unless he had further need of consultation with her father. She endeavoured to persuade herself that the young man meant nothing to her.

On Christmas day Jock Hitchcock asked for Mira's hand in marriage, and when her father demurred because it had been customary in Massachusetts society for a younger daughter to wait until her older sister was spoken for, Laura pleaded with him to give his consent.

"If Mira is made to wait indefinitely she will begin

to fret and perhaps blame me for spoiling her happiness. She is deeply in love with Jock and he with her. We are living in Upper Canada now, Papa. The social customs of Great Barrington have no place here."

"That may be true, but I am determined they shall at least wait until the autumn when Mira will be eighteen. If they married now where would they live? With Jock's brother? No, that I shall not permit!" Thomas spoke emphatically.

"I know Jock plans to have a cabin on the lot adjacent to his brother's farm. He and Jim have been felling trees to make a clearing, and in the spring Jock intends to build a house for Mira. Please, Papa, tell them now that they may wed as soon as it is ready. You must know that it is altogether possible I shall never marry."

"Very well, my dear." Thomas regarded her thoughtfully for a moment. "It occurs to me that you, my eldest daughter, have had little opportunity to meet eligible suitors. You've been the victim of an unavoidable set of circumstances. The upheaval in Massachusetts and our subsequent settlement in this sparsely inhabited part of Upper Canada have combined to make it almost impossible for you to form an acquaintance with either young men or women of your own age. I'm very sorry, Laura."

Unexpectedly, one day in late May, James Secord came to the Ingersoll home again. The sun was warm in the vegetable garden where Laura and Mira were raking, cultivating the soil in readiness for the seeds they had saved from the previous summer's crop of peas, squash, and corn.

At a safe distance from the house Mary and Ma Davis had built a smudge fire to smoke the hams and sides of bacon they had taken from the curing barrel and suspended over a length of maple sapling supported at each end by trestles. Woollen blankets were spread on the grass near the kitchen door to air in the sunlight. At the edge of the clearing Elizabeth, Harriet, and the small children were searching for wildflowers.

When she saw him tether his horse and walk toward her as he had done that first time, Laura's cheeks grew hot and her hands trembled on the rake she held.

It was Mira who answered his greeting.

"Good morning, Mr. Secord," she said. "Did you wish to see my father? I'm sorry he is not at home. He and Mother are visiting friends and are not expected to return until late this afternoon. If you care to do so you are welcome to wait, although I'm afraid you've caught us at an awkward time. We're busy with our spring chores, as you can see."

He nodded to Mira as though he had not heard her.

"Miss Laura," he said, taking the rake from her hand, "could you leave your gardening for a little while and come for a walk with me? I would like very much to talk with you."

"Like this?" Laura asked, holding out two grubby hands.

He took a handkerchief from his pocket and gently brushed the soil from her fingers and continued to hold one hand tightly in his as he led her away from the garden, past the house, down the path toward the river. When they were beyond sight of the others he stopped, placed his hands on her shoulders, and said, "I love you, Laura. I've come to ask you to marry me. How is it with you, dear? Is there any feeling in your heart for me?"

Her thoughts in a turmoil, she stood with eyes downcast, unable to speak. Was this love, this feeling of soft limpness in her body, this wild beating of her heart?

When she did not reply he placed one hand beneath her chin and turned her face up to his. "Look at me, Laura. Let your eyes tell me what is in your heart. Don't be afraid. It is not immodest for a woman to confess that she cares for a man. Tell me you love me."

"I've wanted to love you, James, but you gave me no hint that you cared for me. How could I know. . ."

The words trailed off into silence as he folded her in his arms, and his mouth found hers in a kiss that seemed never to end, and yet was not long enough. Again he kissed her, and again, her lips responding to his until at last she drew away, breathless. He kissed her soft hair,

her nose, her mouth again. "My sweet, sweet Laura," he whispered.

They stood, hand in hand, at the water's edge, the sun warm on their shoulders, while James talked to her of his plans and hopes for the future. "I wanted to tell you how I felt when I was here last autumn, but I dared not," he said. "I had to be certain that I could support a wife, and at that point there was some doubt that I could establish my business at St. David's. Everything is in order now. I am a man of property, the proprietor of a shop that is beginning to be profitable, and I have a house for my bride." He folded her in his arms and kissed her again. "Can we be married soon, my darling? We need each other, you and I."

Laura's smile was shyly mischievous as she let her fingers caress his forehead and run through his black hair. "That, Mr. Secord, is a matter you must settle with my father," she said with mock primness.

James grimaced. "It was my intention to ask your father's permission to court you," he said as they turned to walk back toward the house, "but when I saw you in the garden I could think of nothing except that I must tell you I love you."

Mira was jubilant when Laura told her that she and James intended to be married. "Set the date soon, Laura. Father will be happier if his eldest daughter is the first to be wed."

Laura and James were married at the end of June, beneath the mammoth oak tree that stood near the house, with Mira and Jock Hitchcock attending them. Nearby, improvised tables were spread with linen cloths ready for the banquet that would follow the wedding. Bottles of madeira wine, a cask of port, a keg of rum stood ready for the toasts.

In a voice crisp with emotion Laura's father read the words that gave his firstborn child into the keeping of another man, and the neighbours who had gathered in the shade of the tree's spreading branches to witness the ceremony, nodded one to another, sympathetically.

She stood with James, her hand in his, and made her responses in clear, soft tones. A gown of sprigged muslin

fell in soft folds over her pink ruffled petticoat. Her fair hair hung in ringlets to frame the pale, sensitive face.

At the last moment Mistress Sally, eyes glistening with unshed tears, had placed a bouquet of wild roses in her stepdaughter's hand. "Be happy," she whispered.

Laura smiled warmly as she reached up to kiss her mother's cheek. "I am happy, very happy," she murmured, and glanced at James.

He seemed to tower above her in his long green coat, gray trousers, polished boots. When their eyes met he smiled and his hand closed tightly over hers as his lips formed the words, "My wife," and her father began to read the marriage service.

Gentle Betsy's fragile ornaments and silver spoons were packed carefully in the box with her blankets, household linen, when Laura set out with her new husband on the journey to their home at the village of St. David's.

"You were her firstborn. She would have wanted you to have them," her father had said when he gave them to her.

Chapter 8

At St. David's

Laura sat in the garden at the rear of the St. David's house with her infant daughter, Charlotte, in her arms and watched two-year-old Mary toddle among the shrubs in pursuit of a gray kitten. The June sun was warm on her face and presently she moved farther into the shade of the cherry trees in order to protect the baby's eyes from the dazzling rays.

In the kitchen Ma Davis was helping the new servant girl, Lizzie Deans, with preparations for dinner. Laura frowned slightly, as she idly listened to Ma's voice, remembering that her good friend would be going back to Mistress Sally's house tomorrow. Ma had come to St. David's a week or so before the birth of Charlotte and, because Laura was ill after the baby's arrival, remained for several weeks.

While Laura rocked the baby gently in the ladder-back chair James came round the corner of the house, gathered Mary up into his arms, swung her onto his shoulder and, in imitation of a horse, galloped through the garden before he deposited her on the grass. He stopped to pat the baby's cheek, placed a kiss on Laura's forehead, wiped the perspiration from his face, and knelt beside her on the grass. "Has anyone told you how pretty you are, Mrs. Secord?" he asked, teasingly. "Who would believe you've been married for three long years?"

"Three good years, James!"

"They have been good years, indeed," he agreed. "You've no regrets?"

"None since that day when we first arrived here." She smiled wryly. "I can still remember my consternation when I discovered axes and rakes leaning against the porch; the front room lined with shelf upon shelf of men's boots, women's shoes, bolts of calico, and linsey woolsey. There were kegs of rum and casks of molasses on the floor, and the smell of leather harness made me feel ill."

"I don't understand. You knew I was a merchant, that I had a store at St. David's! Why were you so upset?" James asked in a puzzled voice.

"I was aware that you had a shop, yes, but it hadn't occurred to me that your merchandise would occupy the front half of the house."

"I remember how very quiet you were," James said slowly. "I was so anxious to have you approve of the house and disappointed that you had no words of praise for it. When you said nothing at all I concluded you must be exhausted from the journey."

"If I had tried to tell you how I felt I'm sure I would have cried. You see I had envisioned a cosy sitting room with comfortable chairs, and a stand, or whatnot on which to place my mother's treasures. I loved you so much I didn't want to hurt you by saying I was disappointed."

"My poor dear," he said, stroking her hand. "It didn't occur to me to explain that it is customary in a small village for a merchant to use a portion of his house as a shop; he must of necessity display his wares where customers can see them readily."

She nodded. "So Ann informed me the next day."

"Stephen's wife? I remember that she called to bring you some delicacy — strawberry preserves or maple sugar. She was anxious to meet her new sister-in-law as soon as possible. You and she have become good friends, haven't you, Lolly?"

"Yes, Ann is like a real sister to me, and because of her the other women in the village are my friends also."

James began to smile. "I seem to recall that business picked up appreciably for a short time after your arrival at St. David's. Ladies came into the shop almost every day, presumably to purchase molasses or cotton bombazine. Each one carried a goodwill gift and asked to see my bride."

"Do you remember how embarrassed I was the afternoon you ushered Mrs. Fraser and her elderly mother into the kitchen unexpectedly?" Laura's forehead wrinkled in a frown. "I wanted to hide myself because I had no refreshment, except fresh home-baked bread spread with sweet butter to offer them with their tea. What a ninny I was to be so upset!"

"I only remember how very young and vulnerable you seemed, with your matron's cap pushed back from your forehead, a cap with pink bows that matched the colour in your cheeks exactly. When the ladies addressed you as Mistress Secord I felt very proud to be your husband."

"Thank you for those sweet words, my love. You can have no idea how much I needed your moral support that day. Do you remember how insistent I was that you wait to drink tea with us? I was terrified at the thought of being left alone to entertain the visitors. I'm sure I would have been unable to think of a single topic of conversation, but with you in the room to give me confidence I found I could talk with them quite naturally. James, I need your strength, your courage, more than you can possibly know. I always shall. Without you I'm nothing."

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "You're quite wrong! If a crisis were to arise, I'm certain you would find an inner strength to carry you through the emergency."

He rose from the grass, reached out his arms to take the baby, and helped Laura to her feet. One hand held the infant securely against his shoulder, the other was clasped over hers tightly, as they walked toward the house and little Mary trotted behind them.

"My dear," he said, "I wonder if you know how happy you make me feel. A man likes to hear the kind of remark you made a moment ago, to believe that his wife

has need of him and is dependent on his strength. I love you for it."

Four miles from St. David's, on the Niagara River, the village of Queenston was rapidly developing into an important trading post, and when it was officially designated Port Queenston in 1801, James decided to establish a general store there.

"It seems to me," he said to Laura when they discussed the new venture, "that the opportunities for success will be much greater in a location on the river to which sailing vessels from Oswego or Kingston bring drygoods, farm implements, and rum from New York and Montreal. If I wish to order quality goods from England the British ships will carry the merchandise to Quebec where it will be transferred to voyageurs' batteaux to be transported up the St. Lawrence River and across Lake Ontario to Queenston. I've noticed that a good many Indians come here to trade their furs for blankets of English wool, firearms, and gunpowder. One sees them near the wharf unloading piles of beaver pelts from their slender canoes. These skins are usually of fine quality and would command a high price in England. It is a profitable line of business and I intend to have a share of it."

While Laura or Lizzie Deans tended the store at St. David's James rode to Port Queenston every day in search of a suitable location for the new shop. "I've purchased a site for the store close to the waterfront and engaged men to begin work on a building immediately," he announced, jubilantly, when he found what he considered an ideal lot.

In answer to Laura's questioning glance he went on. "Don't worry, my dear. Although the shop must necessarily be located near the wharf for convenience, it would be neither wise nor appropriate for us to reside there. Transient strangers, sailors from the ships, men whom I might not care to have enter our home, are likely to frequent my place of business. Fortunately, I've been able to purchase a fine piece of land on the outskirts of the vil-

lage where several other homes are being built. Everyone is confident that Queenston will become larger now that it is a port. Some men prophesy that it will be as large as Kingston in a few years. You must drive over to the village with me tomorrow, Lolly. I would like to show you the property and we must decide on the size of house we are going to build, as well as its location on the lot."

By the time he was able to move his family to Queenston James was confident that his business would soon be a profitable venture. He, as well as other Loyalists in Upper Canada, would be a man of property with a fine home, a successful business. For more than a year he rode the four miles from St. David's each morning, his removal to Port Queenston delayed several weeks past the date planned by the imminent arrival of their third child, Harriet.

Accompanied by Mistress Sally and her infant son James, Ma Davis again made the journey to St. David's for Laura's confinement. She went about her preparations for the delivery with quiet efficiency, but when Laura's hands slipped again and again from the improvised straps that were fastened around the posts of her fourposter bed Ma summoned Mistress Sally to sponge her stepdaughter's forehead, wet the parched lips, and murmur words of encouragement until the ordeal was ended.

When Ma Davis had carried the infant away to be washed Laura smiled weakly at Mistress Sally, reached out her hand from the coverlet and whispered, "Thank you, Mother. It was good to have you near me."

On the day before the Secords left St. David's Thomas Ingersoll arrived with Elizabeth, and on the following morning was assigned the task of transporting his wife and the children to the new house. Mistress Sally sat upright in the carriage, with Mary and Charlotte beside her on the seat, and urged her husband to drive with care over a road deeply potholed after the spring rains.

The neighbours had assembled early to begin the task of dismantling the barn. While still heavy with sleep the chickens had been gathered into rude cartons,

made with slat sides, and placed in one of the wagons. The Secords' four pigs were urged, grunting and squealing, into another. With a rope about her neck, the cow Bessie was led off to Queenston by one of the farmers, her bawling calf at her heels. When the livestock had been removed the men began to strip the shop and carry the furniture from the sitting room to be loaded onto the waiting carts. Under the watchful eye of Ma Davis the beds were taken apart; commodes and chests were wrapped about with blankets for protection against possible scratches. Everything had been packed securely by the time Thomas returned for Laura and Elizabeth. Ma Davis refused to ride in the carriage, preferring a seat in one of the wagons in order to be certain, she said, that nothing important was left behind.

Before the wagons moved away the neighbours' wives fed their hungry men from hampers of food they had brought with them. It was late afternoon when the last vehicle reached the new house at Queenston, and before the task of unloading began Laura, with the assistance of Elizabeth, served the workers fresh bread with cheese and currant jam, accompanied by large quantities of scalding tea. For those who preferred it James had provided rum and whisky as well.

The sitting room carpet was laid and the furniture set in place, and when the beds had been reassembled and placed in the upstairs bedrooms and the chests and commodes arranged against the walls, an elderly musician began to play his fiddle as he led the way to the new barn for the dancing.

One young man and then another singled out the maiden of his choice. The girls smiled their pleasure, smoothed their skirts, and followed their escorts to the improvised dance floor where several married couples joined them. At the insistence of their friends James and Laura led the others in the opening reel. His eyes smiled into hers, and she murmured, "I feel like a girl again."

In a voice husky with sudden emotion, he replied, "For a married woman of twenty-seven you look very much like the girl I fell in love with."

Promptly at eleven o'clock the music ceased, while

the fiddler went to slake his thirst and the women hurried to spread the table for supper. It was long past midnight when the wagons creaked away from the door.

Stephen and Ann Secord were the last to go. There were tears in Ann's eyes as she kissed her sister-in-law affectionately. "We shall miss you," she said.

"And we you, Sister. You must come often to visit us. Thank you for all your kindness."

"We are fortunate to have had such fine neighbours. They have been very good to us," James remarked when he and Laura reached the privacy of their bedroom.

Laura sat before the toilet table, brushing her long fair hair. A matron's cap had been tossed aside as if, suddenly, it was too confining. A light housegown covered her night shift and she drew it more closely about her as a soft breeze came through the open window.

"They are very dear people," she said. "I was a stranger to them when you brought me home to St. David's after our marriage and they made me feel most welcome. I hope we shall continue to see them for I cherish them very much."

James rose from the chair in which he had sat to remove his leather boots and crossed the room to stand behind her. He took the brush from her hand and began to stroke her hair, curling the shining strands round his fingers. "I wonder if you know how lovely you are," he said.

When the first light of dawn tinged the sky she lay in the fourposter bed, wide awake in the darkness of the room, with her head against James's shoulder, and his arms tight around her, thinking about her relationship with this man who was so strong, yet so tender. Their love for each other had deepened in the years since their marriage and their passion had intensified. She had not known that two people could experience such all-encompassing happiness. When a man and a woman cared for each other so deeply their years together must be full, satisfying. It could not be otherwise, she reasoned. No obstacle, no difficulty, would be insurmountable as long as she and James were together!

Chapter 9

A New Home

On the morning following their arrival at Queenston Laura stood at the door of the new house with James and her father to wave goodbye to Ma Davis. Ma had insisted on going home immediately. She admitted that she did not look forward to the journey, jolting over the uneven road to the Thames in the back of Joey's wagon, but she had promised to be on hand for Mira's impending confinement. So long as she was able to practise her skills as a midwife no offspring of any of the Ingersoll girls would be born without her assistance. "I declare, Miss Laura, if it weren't for Miss Mira I'd stay with you until the Master and Mistress get back from York. 'Twould be a much more comfortable journey and I'd be able to get you settled while they're away," she said.

Thomas and Mistress Sally intended to go to York on the first ship from Queenston, and would leave Elizabeth and the Ingersoll son with the Secords during their absence. Her sister would be of invaluable assistance to Laura, Mistress Sally avowed, and the child would make no extra work in a household where there were three other small children.

Now, as they stood waiting for Joey's wagon to disappear from view, Thomas told them the reason for the further journey. "There have been a number of changes

in the London District since you were married, Laura. New settlers have been attracted to the area because of the extreme fertility of the land. Many of these newcomers have crossed the border at Fort Detroit and come up the Thames valley. When we first moved to the river our house was surrounded on three sides by forest, as you know. Now it stands near the edge of a village which bears my name. Can you imagine what it is like, Laura?"

"No, Father, but I'm sure it is less lonely there now. Tell me, are you and Mother happy at Ingersoll?"

"Not really, my dear. Oh, I have no real complaint against my neighbours, and your mother finds the villagers very agreeable. To be truthful, I am somewhat worried about my property. I've been unable to obtain a clear deed although it appears that the Lieutenant-Governor is now able to issue such papers. It is on that account I am going to York."

The sisters had not seen each other since Laura's marriage and were delighted with the prospect of spending several weeks together. They set to work immediately to put Laura's house in order, and as they laboured, conversation flowed rapidly. There were so many questions to be asked and answered. While Lizzie Deans cooked meals and attended the children, they rearranged the furniture to their liking. Curtains, which Laura had made while awaiting the arrival of Harriet, were hung in the sitting room; a fresh tester and draperies were arranged over the old fourposter bed that had been set up in the spare room.

In order to adequately equip the larger house it had been necessary to order several new pieces of furniture. For the bedroom occupied by Laura and James, the Scottish cabinetmaker at Niagara fashioned chests, a wardrobe, and a washstand from the wood of black walnut trees native to the area. The bedposts were carved to match the chests. Bookshelves of the same polished wood had been set between the windows. Here, Laura placed the books she brought from Great Barrington to her father's home on the Thames. There had been no appropriate place in the St. David's house to display them and while she lived there they had remained in their boxes.

Now she touched her worn volumes of the *Vicar of Wakefield* with loving hands, arranged them on the shelf beside Smollet's *Travels through France and Italy* and the *Arabian Nights*. Absently, she moved Harriet's freshly painted crib from its position beneath the window to a place within easy reach of the fourposter bed.

Across the hall, in a room gay with flowered muslin curtains and counterpanes, three narrow white cots were ranged against the walls, one each for Mary and Charlotte, the third for Elizabeth. Near it stood the cradle which had been moved from the kitchen to serve as a bed for the baby James.

In the evening of the day on which Laura's parents departed for York, James answered a knock at the door and upon opening it discovered a number of men and women from the village assembled near the stoop in the gathering dusk. Led by his sister Magdalen Cartwright and her husband Richard, who were at Queenston during the summer months, the visitors chanted the words, "Welcome neighbours, welcome."

James grasped Laura's hand and drew her outside, quickly, to be introduced. With his arm about her waist, his voice prompting her when she hesitated over a name, she began almost at once to feel at ease among the men and women who had gathered to wish them well.

"Do come in!" she said, smiling, her hands outstretched toward them in welcome. "This is a very pleasant surprise."

She exclaimed over the packages of food the ladies carried in their hands, currant and jam tarts, roasted chickens, and fresh home-baked bread, then led the way to the kitchen while the men remained out of doors to savour the balmy summer air.

Proudly, she ushered her guests upstairs to her bedroom. When they had smoothed down the skirts of their muslin and calico gowns and patted their hats into place before her mirror, each one examined the carving on the walnut furniture, exclaimed over its delicate beauty, admired the draperies, and begged to be taken on a tour of the house.

"I'll show your guests the other rooms, Sister," Eliz-

abeth offered. With a candle held high in one hand, fingers at her lips in a gesture of silence, she led them across the hall to the room where the children were sleeping.

Laura was about to follow when she noticed that a slight, blonde girl, younger than she, had paused before the shelf of books, and in the dim light was straining her eyes to read the titles. "Let me hold a candle for you," she said, and fetched one from a wall sconce. "Are you fond of reading?"

"Thank you, yes. Mrs. Secord, I'm Mary Dexter. I was looking at your copy of the *Vicar of Wakefield*. It is such an interesting story. Would you think me very bold if I asked for the loan of it? I'll return it quite soon."

"Of course you may borrow it." Laura placed the book in her visitor's hand. "I'm quite fond of *The Vicar* myself. That copy is one my father brought me from the city of New York a long time ago when we were living in Massacshetts. I treasure it for sentimental reasons as well as for its value as a story."

"Thank you so much. A friend let me have her copy while we were living at York, but unfortunately we had to move away before I was able to finish the last chapters. I shall enjoy it from the beginning now. If you like reading I think you would enjoy our reading group, Mrs. Secord. I'm sure Mrs. Hamilton intends to ask you to join."

"Tell me about it," Laura said.

"Those of us who enjoy reading share our books, loan them to each other. Some families, the Hamiltons and the Cartwrights in particular, own quite extensive private libraries, while others like my husband and me have only a few volumes. We have formed the habit of meeting at each other's homes to talk about the books over a cup of tea. I find the discussions very stimulating."

"How long did you live at York, Mrs. Dexter?" Laura asked.

"Two years. We were married there. My husband is an assistant land surveyor and away from home a great deal of the time. When we moved to Queenston about six

months ago I was very pleased because my aunt and uncle live at Shipman's Corners. Their name is Shipman. Perhaps you have heard of them. I go there to visit them sometimes when Robert is away for an extended period of time."

Laura shook her head. "James may know of them. He grew up in the Niagara peninsula. Come, we must go downstairs now. Elizabeth will have shown the ladies into every nook and cranny of the house, I'm sure."

Instinctively drawn to this younger woman who so obviously was often lonely, Laura linked arms with her as they went down the stairs together to join in the game of charades which Madge Cartwright had begun to organize in the sitting room.

"Richard and I will expect you to take dinner with us after church service on Sunday," her sister-in-law reminded the Secords when she said goodbye at the end of the evening. "Mary and Robert Dexter will be coming. You'll like them, Laura. Perhaps I shall ask the preacher, the Reverend David Pickett, for Elizabeth."

"Thank you," Laura said. "Everyone is so very kind. Mrs. Merritt has invited Elizabeth and me to a quilting bee next Wednesday week, and the Macleans are planning to give a barn dance."

"I'm so glad," Magdalen Cartwright replied. "We are plain folks, Laura. Our pleasures are simple, but we enjoy them to the full. I hope that you and James will be happy among us."

Richard took a cigar from his pocket, paused to light it in the flame of a candle, and came to stand beside his wife. "Of course they will be happy. There can be no doubt of it." His deep, resonant voice boomed out heartily as he bent to pat Laura's cheek. "I like you, my dear. James is a fortunate man to have married such a gentle, serene woman."

Chapter 10

Filling the Bride's Chest

Laura remembered Madge Cartwright's remark often during the weeks that followed and thought she had never been so content. She seemed to have become a person in her own right at last. No longer was she referred to as her father's eldest daughter, Mistress Sally's dependable assistant, or the storekeeper's bride, as she had been at St. David's. She was Mrs. James Secord who lived in the white frame house at the edge of the hill that sloped above the village toward Queenston Heights. Women deferred to her opinion, sought her advice about patterns for their daughters' clothes, or a new recipe for pound cake. Although she often played childish games with her children in the garden or, accompanied by Elizabeth, gathered wild plums and whortleberries for jam, staining her fingers a deep purple, her skirts snagged by the brambles, there was a new dignity about her, an inner glow.

James noticed the change. "You've lost your shyness, Lolly. I've watched the animation in your face, observed the ease with which you now make conversation with the most casual acquaintance. I like the new Mrs. Secord."

In September Lizzie Deans gave notice that she was about to marry the young man who had courted her on Sunday evenings throughout the summer. She would

finish the housecleaning, she announced, and then go home to St. David's, to prepare for her wedding.

Aware that Lizzie's bridal chest was almost empty and her family were in poor circumstances, Laura invited the neighbours to a quilting bee. She and Elizabeth sorted through boxes of patches for suitable cotton and woollen materials to which were added one or two short lengths of fabrics from James's shop. The sisters worked early and late to cut small squares or triangles of cotton and wool, joining the pieces together with careful stitches to form a design. When they had prepared six quilt lengths several ladies from the village assembled at the Secord house for a day of sewing. Each one came equipped with needles, thimbles, and scissors. At one end of the sitting room the quilting frames stood ready for use, and there each woman was directed to a specific task by Madge Cartwright. A bolt of cotton material for lining or a roll of inner filling donated by James were cut into appropriate lengths. One at a time, strips of the lining were spread on the dining table and covered with a length of filling and a patchwork top. The layers were basted together, secured to the quilting frame by means of small nails hammered into the wooden bars. Mrs. Cartwright used a piece of tailor's chalk to draw a pattern of semi-circular lines on the patchwork, and three ladies, ranged along either side of the frame, traced the lines meticulously, their needles moving through the fabric in small, even stitches. When they paused for a cup of tea and Laura's pound cake the conversation flowed easily.

"Your Lizzie Deans is indeed a fortunate girl," Hannah Nelles observed. "You are very good to her, Laura."

"Have you found anyone to take her place?" Mary Dexter asked.

When Laura shook her head Madge Cartwright suggested that she should engage two servants, and Mira Hamilton offered to make inquiries from her black girl.

The Cartwrights were about to return to Kingston for the winter. In a few days their house would be closed.

"We shall miss you sorely, Madge," Laura said, as she offered her sister-in-law a second cup of tea.

"And I shall be lonely for all of you. Although we have some very good friends at Kingston there is no one who can take the place of the Queenston and Niagara people. I feel so close to everyone here. You are my very dear friends."

"Will you come back again next summer?" Mary Dexter asked.

"God willing, yes, Mary. It has become a part of the pattern of our lives to spend the summers here. I should feel very sad if anything occurred to upset that plan."

The hemmed and folded quilts were packed in a wooden box to which Laura added two pairs of her own hand-woven linen sheets and a wool blanket. With Elizabeth's assistance she cut and sewed a bridal gown which, when presented to Lizzie, brought tears of joyful gratitude to her wondering eyes.

"I don't really want to leave you, Ma'am," she sniffled. "It is just that my Jake has taken over part of his father's land, and will be needing a woman to keep house for him. I wanted to wait till spring so I'd be able to show the girl who takes my place how you like things done, but Ma says maybe Jake won't wait if I don't marry him now."

Laura smiled. "Don't you worry about us, Lizzie. We shall be sorry to lose you, but I'm sure we'll manage. Your Ma is right. Men don't like to be put off when they are in the mood for marrying. Go along and make your Jake happy."

Lizzie Deans was replaced by two young black servants, Bob and Fan, whose willing, efficient work won loud praise from Mistress Sally. The Ingersolls had returned from York on the day after Bob and Fan were hired and, at Laura's insistence, stayed on for several days beyond their intended time of departure in order that Mistress Sally might enjoy the social gatherings to which her stepdaughter's friends invited her. Indian summer had come, the trees were almost bare of leaves, and there was a hint of frost in the air when, after much urging by Thomas, they set off for Ingersoll, accompanied by small James and a most reluctant Elizabeth.

"I envy you, Laura," she said, as the sisters tucked

the children into their beds on her last evening at Queenston. "This is such a pleasant place to live. The people are so friendly and agreeable. It is very quiet at home without you and Mira. Harriet stays with Mira almost constantly, and our stepmother is busy with the younger children. There is no one with whom I can talk as I've talked with you and Mary Dexter. I've been so happy here, so stimulated by the friendships I've made. Now, I shall go back to being the quiet, older daughter again."

"But surely now that a village has spread along the river there must be someone near who is agreeable!"

"The people seem different, more reserved, concerned with their own affairs. They work very hard, perhaps because they must if they are to eke out a reasonable living. Some, who have never really taken their oath of allegiance seriously, regard themselves as Americans still. There are one or two who actually believe that Upper Canada will in time become a part of the United States. Surely you can understand there is no one there whom I know or care about in the way I've learned to like your friends in the weeks I've been here."

"And David Pickett? How well have you learned to know and like him? I wonder if we shall see as much of him after you leave us."

"Reverend Pickett is a very serious young man, dedicated to his work. I think we could be friends if he were not so concerned about his flock. He has called here quite often during the summer, I agree, perhaps because he likes to talk with the people whom he meets in your house — James, the Cartwrights, and you, Laura. Never for a moment has he given me reason to think he is especially interested in me."

Laura smiled. "You speak very positively," she said.

Chapter 11

Life at Port Queenston

The winter of 1803-4 was long and intensely cold, with extended periods of snowfall so heavy that families were often housebound for several days at a time. Those ladies who met weekly to sew, read, or exchange books were forced to forego their social gatherings, temporarily. Instead, they dropped in at one or another's homes, unheralded, on those evenings when their menfolk were able to accompany them. A man's strong hands, held tightly on the reins, were needed to guide any horse-drawn sleigh through the deep snow when as often as not the vehicle overturned at least once and tumbled its merry occupants into a heavy drift.

At times James was forced to travel to and from his shop on snowshoes; he often closed it early because of lack of customers. In the evenings he pored over his account books by lamplight in an attempt to determine his financial position. He had every reason to believe that his business had prospered, although the fact that many transactions were conducted in trade or barter contributed to his difficulty in balancing the accounts exactly.

The last batteaux to come from Quebec before the onset of winter had brought only a few of the items he had expected from England. Whether the balance of his order was at Montreal or Kingston, awaiting delivery by the first boats in the spring, or whether it had been lost

at sea he did not know. Aware that France was again at war with England, he suspected the latter.

"So much of my finer merchandise comes from England," he said, uneasily. "Unless the British can continue to control the sea lanes the overseas portion of my business may have to be closed out. If Napoleon's warships should succeed in attacking British merchantmen on the high seas it will be impossible for us to order goods from England with any degree of confidence that the stock will be delivered." He gathered his accounts into a neat pile and moved to a chair by the fire where Laura sat.

"Perhaps you are worrying unnecessarily," she suggested and reached out to stroke his forehead. "You can do nothing, in any event, but wait and hope the goods will arrive safely in the spring. I must say I wish the English wool you ordered had come. It is so much nicer for your stockings than our own handcarded yarn."

The knitting needles clicked busily as her fingers moved with the speed and dexterity of long practice to fashion a child's mitten. In a moment James got up from his chair, stirred the fire with a long poker, added an extra log, and went to stand by the window. The panes were frosted, thickly. Unable to see through them he moved to the door and opened it a crack, letting in a wave of frigid air. "There is a full moon," he said. "The storm is over. Wrap a shawl about your shoulders and come see how bright the stars are."

Oblivious of the cold for the moment, they stood together in the open doorway, his arm tight about her waist, and gazed out over the wintry landscape. "See how the snow clings to the pine trees by the gate, and how it outlines the skeletons of the birches" Laura exclaimed. "It is unbelievably beautiful, so clear, so crisp and quiet. One can almost hear the silence."

"It is a splendid night for a sleigh ride, and if I'm not mistaken we shall have visitors presently. Listen! Can you hear the sleigh bells?"

"Do you think they will come here?" Laura's teeth chattered with cold as she spoke.

"We'll soon know. You're shivering, Lolly. Go in

now, before you are chilled. I'm going to clear some of this snow away from the door."

Laura filled the kettle with water dipped from a pail in the kitchen and placed it on the stove to boil. She measured tea into an earthenware pot, set it at the back of the stove to warm, took mugs from the cupboard, and brought rum from the storeroom for the hot toddies she knew each man would need to warm him. When everything was in readiness she lighted a candle, carried it to the nursery, and made certain that her children were warmly covered and asleep. Mary Dexter was warming her hands before the fire when she returned to the sitting room.

"Robert and Reverend Pickett have gone with James to stable the horses," Mary said. "The men are concerned about some news Robert heard at Fort George a few days ago. They wanted to talk with James about it. I hope you won't mind having late callers."

"I'm always glad to see you, Mary. You know that. Come upstairs and remove your wraps." In Laura's bedroom she said, "I want to show you a bed gown I've made." and when Mary exclaimed over the long white robe, bright with colourful embroidery, Laura confided, "I'm with child again. James and I are both hoping this one will be a boy."

"How I envy you, Lolly! You are a very fortunate woman."

When Laura and Mary went down to the kitchen James was pouring rum into the toddy mugs while he talked with his visitors. The men hovered over the stove with hands spread close to its warmth. Laura took currant scones from a box on the shelf, arranged them on a lustre plate, and cupped her hands about the teapot to test its warmth as the kettle began to sing.

"The sitting-room fire is waiting to be enjoyed," she said to James. "Mary and I will bring the toddies as soon as the water boils."

"What significance do you think this Louisiana transaction will have for the people of Upper Canada?" Robert Dexter asked when everyone had gathered about the fire, the men sipping hot rum, the ladies their tea.

James spoke slowly, while he calculated figures on a scrap of paper. "Louisiana is a vast territory, I'm told. It is difficult to conjecture why Napoleon Bonaparte would dispose of it to the United States so readily and cheaply when the French have only recently acquired the land from Spain."

He looked up from his calculation. "Eighty million francs would be about fifteen million dollars in American currency. It seems a small sum to pay for a territory that stretches virtually from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains and could encompass perhaps a million square miles. With the acquisition of Louisiana I should think the area of the United States will have almost doubled."

"This land transaction should certainly guarantee America's continued alliance with France," David Pickett remarked. "What implications the Louisiana purchase may have for us, if this second war between England and Napoleon should prove to be a lengthy one, I wouldn't venture to predict."

Robert Dexter finished his toddy in one long gulp, reached out and placed his mug on the hearth. "Some of the Americans who have taken up land in Upper Canada, those who have come within the last two or three years particularly, seem to be of the opinion that the United States will at some time take possession of Canada, and that no blood will be shed over the transaction, or tears either. In my travels through the country, doing my work as a land surveyor, I have several times heard the opinion expressed that the people of Upper Canada would welcome annexation by the Yankees."

"Never, while there are Loyalists to resist them!" James's voice was husky with indignation. "My father fought against the rebels in the War of Independence, and because he was loyal to England lost all his property in New York State. Like many other Tories who came to Fort Niagara he was a member of Colonel John Butler's Rangers. I was scarcely more than an infant in arms when my mother and her friends were forced to flee from their homes with no man to accompany them. Our family knew the privation, the hunger that was common to

every Loyalist who had to leave his comfortable home in the colonies. The Yankees robbed us of our heritage once. Mark my words, we'll not let it happen again."

Laura rose from her chair and went to stand beside her husband. "Calm yourself, James," she whispered. "I don't like to see you become so overwrought."

He patted her hand, smiled apologetically at his visitors. "I'm sorry," he apologized. "I've heard that remark about annexation too, Robert. It rouses my anger and makes me most uneasy."

When spring came Bob helped his mistress make a vegetable plot, and at her direction brought wildflowers from the forest, hepaticas, delicate blue violets, and tall jack-in-the-pulpits to plant in her flower garden. Although her body was heavy with the unborn child she performed her household tasks with enjoyment.

The mandrake crop was a bountiful one, and with her small daughters, Mary and Charlotte, at her heels she searched every sunny bank or clearing for the luscious yellow May apples that were hidden beneath the plant's sheltering leaves. With Fan's assistance the fruit was combined with maple sugar to make deliciously sweet preserves that must last until the next bumper crop.

Toward the end of July the new baby arrived, a fourth girl who was named Hannah. Laid up with an attack of painful rheumatism, Ma Davis had been unable to make the journey to Queenston for the confinement. Laura was obliged to depend upon the services of a strange midwife who, as soon as the child had been delivered, hurried away to attend another birthing.

Mary Dexter came to take tea with Laura the following day, and when she espied Hannah tears started from her eyes. "I hadn't realized that a baby could be so small, and yet so perfectly formed. Are you very disappointed not to have a son?"

Laura shook her head. "When you bear a child you love it. Whether it be boy or girl matters not."

"Let me hold her, Lolly, please!" She lifted the infant from Laura's bed, cradling her gently, and when Hannah began to whimper sang a lullaby softly until she fell

asleep. "I wish she were mine!" she said wistfully.

James's earlier fears that the war with France might jeopardize his overseas trade had been groundless. Admiral Nelson's victory over the French at Trafalgar confirmed England's supremacy of the seas. Her merchant ships crossed the ocean as free from molestation as they had before the renewal of war and carried goods to Quebec for shipment to Kingston, York, and Port Queenston, where they were distributed to areas remote from those ports.

Beaver pelts which the Indians brought to his shop from the forests that bordered on the upper lakes formed a part of the return cargo to be shipped to England as payment against merchandise which James had received. In return for the pelts the red men stocked their canoes with blankets, gunpowder, and household articles selected from supplies available in his store.

"My business has more than doubled in the three years we have been at Queenston, and my profits also, if I'm not mistaken. It was a strategic time for us to open a shop here. Unless we become involved in a struggle with the Americans the years ahead should be good ones, Lolly," James said.

Chapter 12

Rumblings of War

When the Cartwrights returned to Queenston the following summer Richard brought unexpected news of Laura's family. The Secords, Madge, and he were gathered in the Cartwright library after dinner on the day following their arrival when he spoke of a meeting with Laura's father. He had come upon Thomas Ingersoll, quite by accident, he said, in the Hogshead Inn at York, where both men had put up for the night. There Thomas informed him that he had obtained a contract for operation of the Government Inn at the mouth of the Credit River, not many miles from York, and would move his family to Port Credit before the autumn. He seemed so wrought up that Richard had invited him to his room where they had discussed his affairs at length over a glass of whisky.

"Your father was bitterly angry when I talked with him, Laura. He tells me that some error was made in drawing up the registration papers for his property at Ingersoll, and as a result he has been unable to obtain a clear title to the land. He thinks that in all likelihood he will lose the property. In any event, he intends to move away from the Thames as soon as the Credit Inn is ready for his occupation."

"Poor Papa! He will be upset. I remember well that on his first journey to Upper Canada he was delayed at

Newark for several weeks while the papers were being prepared. How could such an error have been made?"

Richard got up from his seat, opened a drawer beneath one of the book shelves, took out a box of cigars, and offered one to his brother-in-law. "I was fortunate enough to get these in New York a few weeks ago," he said.

He removed another cigar from the box, held it against his nose to savour the mellowness of the tobacco, and when Madge rose to fetch a lighted taper, sat down in her chair next to Laura. "I'm interested in what you've just said, my dear. I can't be certain about the error. Your father tells me that he agreed to sponsor some forty families who would take up a part of the block of land allotted to him by Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe, and that he was unable to fulfil his promise. I'm inclined to think this may have some bearing on the matter although your father does not agree that it should. I've promised him to do what I can to have the matter looked into when the Legislative Assembly meets next month."

"Did my father give you any messages for us? I have heard nothing from Ingersoll since he and my mother visited us a year ago."

"Yes, he asked me to tell you that only the younger members of his family will be removing to the Credit. Harriet insists upon remaining with Mira, and Elizabeth intends to come to Queenston as soon as she has seen her parents settled in their new home. He said he would accompany her when she is ready to make the journey and would see you then."

"Thank you, Richard. It will be good to see them, good to have Elizabeth with us again."

Laura was in the garden with her children, gathering fallen leaves to cover her rose beds against the winter frosts when the visitors arrived. They had come on the last ship from York, at the end of the season. Mary espied them first. She ran toward the gate, crying, "Aunt Lizbeth, Aunt Lizbeth," and held out her arms to be hugged.

Shocked by her father's wan appearance and the strained expression on his face, Laura hurried to em-



Portrait Bust of Laura Secord by Mildred Peel, O.S.A., in the collection of the Government of Ontario.

brace him. "You look ill, Papa. You must come inside and rest."

"We encountered bad weather when we were less than an hour out of York, Lolly. The wind blew with the force of a gale and the waves were terrifyingly high. The storm reminded me of the one we experienced on the voyage from Oswego when we made the journey to Upper Canada."

"It is good to see you, Sister. I hope you will stay with us until the spring comes."

"I'm so glad to be here, Lolly! I feel as if I had come home," Elizabeth replied as Laura kissed her.

Thomas was made to lie on the sofa in the sitting room and Fan arranged a soft wool coverlet over his knees before bringing the tea tray. When they had drunk cups of scalding tea and eaten slices of Fan's pound cake Laura led her sister upstairs. Elizabeth insisted upon having her former bed in the nursery, and when Mary and Charlotte were told they danced excitedly in anticipation of the stories she would tell them.

After a few days of rest Thomas seemed well again and insisted upon returning to Port Credit immediately. Laura pleaded with him to remain until they heard of another traveller who wished to make the journey to York. When she warned that the journey on horseback would be too hazardous for him to undertake alone in the uncertain November weather, he said, "I've got to go, Laura. Your mother will be anxious also."

At Laura's invitation Reverend David Pickett came to dinner with Mary and Robert Dexter on the first Sabbath following his return from an extended visit to the outlying families in the circuit for which he was responsible. That he was immensely pleased to see Elizabeth was immediately obvious to everyone. His eyes followed her every movement, and his remarks seemed to be addressed to her alone.

Mary Dexter's blue eyes sparkled with romantic excitement as she observed his preoccupation with Elizabeth. When dinner was over and the others had gone to sit by the fire she lingered to murmur in Laura's ear, "If I'm not mistaken the Reverend David is about to fall in love."

Laura smiled. "Nothing would give me more pleasure than to see Elizabeth happily married to a man she loves, but what she feels for Reverend Pickett is her secret. She hasn't confided in me."

Always a frequent caller at the Secord house, David Pickett now became a daily visitor. He and Elizabeth took long walks together, sometimes to call upon sick or elderly parishioners, and when they announced their intention of being married in the new year no one was surprised.

It seemed both logical and practical that Elizabeth should be married from her sister's home rather than wait until she could return to her father's house at Port Credit. "Our parents will understand," Laura reassured her when Elizabeth expressed some doubt about the wisdom of marrying without her father's approval. "James and I are happy to give you the best wedding we can. We shall send word to father by the first mail express going to York, and when spring comes I'm quite certain our mother will pack all your possessions, fill your bride's chest, and send everything to you by the first ship. In the meantime I can lend you whatever household articles you may need."

"Thank you, Lolly. You're very generous. It is most unlikely that I shall need to borrow anything from you. David's mother's things are in his house – her bedding, linens, china, everything, just as she left them when she died. He would like me to look them over, decide what we shall require, and what should be given to the needy. Perhaps you will come with me, Laura. I would feel strange about going through the drawers and boxes by myself."

In the spring, when the first ship from Oswego put into Port Queenston with merchandise from New York, the captain brought news of America's growing discontent with England. Great Britain's blockade of European ports had made it impossible for merchant ships of the United States to deliver their cargoes to France, Spain, or other European countries, with the result that trade, except with England or her colonies, had virtually stop-

ped. The captain was indignantly vocal when James went down to the wharf to check the merchandise he had ordered.

"Ye mark my words," he said, shaking a finger in James's face. "If the English persist in this outrageous act there'll be war between us."

The growing tension between England and the United States was a subject of conversation when Richard Cartwright and Robert Hamilton came to the Secord house a few days after the Cartwrights returned to Queenston for the summer. Robert Hamilton, who had been Richard's partner in business prior to setting up his own establishment, held a very definite opinion on the subject. "The whole affair is a tempest in a teapot. 'Tis mere wishful thinking on the part of a few land grabbers who are looking at Canada with covetous eyes," he said.

"Do you not think we should recognize the possibility that the United States may deem it strategic to invade Canada while England is occupied with Napoleon?" James asked.

"The Democrats are anti-British, I grant you, but in my opinion President Jefferson is much too astute a statesman to act impulsively." Richard Cartwright spoke in the authoritative, somewhat pompous tone he frequently used when speaking to his wife's youngest brother. "His years in Paris, at the Hague, and in London have taught him to weigh the pros and cons of any situation carefully. He knows very well that America's military strength is no match for that of the British. England may be fighting a war in Europe but her ships are in command on the high seas. No, James, the possibility of attack from the Yankees is something we need give no further thought to at the present time."

Laura laid her sewing on a small stand beside her chair, got up, and went to the kitchen. When she returned she carried glasses, a bottle of whisky, and a small jug of water which she placed on a low table beside James. The chair beside Richard's was vacant and she sat down in it. "The thought of a Yankee invasion frightens me. You spoke with such confidence, just now. Do you really believe we are free from any danger of

attack?"

"The Yankees will most certainly not invade Upper Canada at the present time. If the war between France and England drags on indefinitely it may become a possibility at some future date, although I think it most unlikely. My dear, the majority of the men and women in America are as peace loving as we are."

Contrary to Richard's expressed opinion, an American declaration of war on England seemed unavoidable for a brief period the following year when, during the exercise of Great Britain's self-declared 'Right of Search,' an American frigate was fired upon scarcely ten miles off the coast of Virginia.

Robert Hamilton brought news of the incident when he returned from a visit to New York. Seated on the broad porch that spanned the front of the Hamiltons' house, the Stephen and David Secords from St. David's, the Cartwrights, Dexters and James and Laura listened while Robert related the story.

"British naval vessels have been stopping American ships on the high seas for some months," he said. "It seems that each time a British ship puts into a Yankee port two or three of her crew desert. The reason is obvious. Pay on American ships is better and the discipline less strict. Naturally, if England is to control the seas she must have sailors to man her ships so she doesn't hesitate to exercise her right of search for deserters on every American ship she encounters. Nor is she hesitant, I'm told, to impress others than the guilty ones. The Americans have become more and more angered by this practice, although until this latest episode there was little or no resistance."

He groped in his pocket for a tobacco pouch, filled his pipe and lit it from a taper which James had thrust into his hand. Long and slowly, he drew on it, savouring the taste. "In New York," he continued, "they are saying that when the commander of the American frigate *Chesapeake* refused to submit to search, the guns of the British ship *Leopard* raked her decks, killing or wounding twenty-one men. Five seamen accused of desertion were removed to the British ship, although the *Leopard's*

commander later admitted that only one of the five had actually been a member of his crew."

"Will it mean war, do you think?" James asked, anxiously.

"President Jefferson has no love for the British, but I think he will avoid any actual conflict if it is at all possible to do so," Richard Cartwright insisted. "One episode of this kind will neither make a war nor injure our trade with the United States. I think you may calm your fears, James."

"You're probably right, Richard," Robert Hamilton agreed. "The United States Congress has just passed an Embargo Act, forbidding ships to leave American ports for foreign countries. I should think President Jefferson hopes that curtailment of food and other supplies to Great Britain will be a sufficiently effective means of retaliation. The President doesn't want war, as you say, nor do the American people, generally speaking. I listened to a good many discussions about this new act while I was in New York. A number of men to whom I spoke seemed uncertain about its effectiveness."

"Can the Yankees afford to cut themselves off from British trade without feeling the pinch, do you think?" James's brother David asked the question.

"I should think the Americans would suffer more than the British from such an act, David." James ran long fingers through his hair as he spoke. "There will be repercussions and we may well be the victims. It is time we began to take our militia duty more seriously. Whether war develops or not it would be wise to be prepared."

Chapter 13

Stagecoach Journey

The Secords' fifth daughter was born that summer, a fair-haired child who, because she resembled her mother, was named for her, and when their son Charles arrived a year later Laura and James felt their happiness was complete.

"At last I have borne a son," Laura wrote to Mistress Sally. "Please tell Ma Davis I missed her gentle urging, her sure confidence when the ordeal was upon me. The baby is fine, healthy, with dark hair and James's eyes. I'm sure his father will be proud when he sees his offspring. James and his brother-in-law Richard set out for Montreal ten days ago to make arrangements with a shipping company for the transportation of potash to England. A good deal of the potash is produced here in the Niagara peninsula, as you know. In fact, to quote James, the only ready money many farm women ever see is derived from the sale of potash. Both he and Richard believe it will prove to be an increasingly profitable commodity to deal in."

Elizabeth Pickett described the method of potash making in detail while she and Mary Dexter drank tea in Laura's sunny bedroom the day after Charles was born. Elizabeth had just returned with her husband from a visit to parishioners in one of the remote districts on his circuit, and was loud in her praise of the resourceful-

ness and thrift of the farm women she had met. The Picketts had been put up overnight by a family whose name was Beam. Upon rising in the morning they had found the housewife hard at work in the clearing behind her cabin, her ten-year-old daughter cooking their breakfast in the kitchen.

"After we had eaten our oatmeal and eggs we went outside where we found two large iron kettles suspended over an open fire," Elizabeth said. "Mrs. Beam went from one to the other, stirring the contents of each with a long wooden stick. In one kettle there was a mixture of lye and tallow, which our hostess informed us would, after prolonged boiling, thicken to form soft soap for household cleaning. The second pot contained only lye which must be boiled until it thickened. After it had cooled she intended to shape it into cakes of potash. She told me that they saved all the hardwood ashes from the hearth and stored them in a dry shed, along with the ashes saved from the trees that were burned when they were clearing their farm. She then led me to an enclosure behind the smokehouse to show me how she made lye by allowing water to drip slowly through a box of hardwood ashes into a bucket she had placed beneath the carton. Every scrap of fat from the meat they consume is saved and put aside to be rendered and made into the tallow she uses with the lye to make the soft soap. If she wishes to make a hard soap she merely adds salt to the boiling liquid. I was surprised to discover that potash is made in much the same way as soap, that it is the addition of tallow to the lye which causes it to become the latter."

Laura nodded. "I've seen Fan make household soap in the same way. Surely you remember that Mary used to make soap for us when we first moved to the Thames and that we helped her mould candles from some of the tallow."

"I had almost forgotten. It seems such a long time ago."

Mary Dexter rose from the ladder-back chair on which she had been sitting and approached Laura's bed. "May I hold him?" she asked, and bent to take the baby from his mother's arms.

"You're very quiet this afternoon, dear." Laura smiled at her friend, affectionately. "Do you feel quite well?"

"Wonderfully well, and happy." The colour rose in Mary's face as she replied. "Oh Lolly, I didn't want to tell you until I'm absolutely certain, but I think, I'm almost sure I'm with child." Suddenly, the tears ran down her cheeks. "After so many years of waiting, envying you each time you had a new baby, I can scarcely believe that Robert and I shall at last have an infant of our own."

"My dear, I'm so glad, so very glad for you!" Laura reached up to place a kiss on Mary's forehead.

Elizabeth had gone to stand by the window where she could watch the children as they gathered piles of fallen leaves in the garden. She turned now and faced the others. "I've a confession to make also," she said. "I wanted to tell David first, but he had to go to York before I was certain. I'm quite sure now. I'm going to have a child too. We shall be company for each other while we wait, Mary. I'm very happy for us."

Upon his return from Montreal James complained of a soreness in his back which caused him to walk with a slight limp. He and Richard had gone by ship to Kingston, where they had spent several days in completing arrangements for the enlargement of his brother-in-law's import business. From Kingston they had taken the new stagecoach to Montreal. In spite of the fact that he attributed his disability to the long ride over an uneven road in the cramped interior of the coach, he praised this recently inaugurated service. "I wish you could have been with me, Lolly. You would have enjoyed the scenery along the river," he said.

He lay across the bed on the night of his return, face down, while Laura rubbed the aching muscles with Ma Davis's special liniment, and between groans of discomfort talked enthusiastically about his journey.

"Parts of the highway leading east from Kingston are little more than a rutted track," he said. "The road winds for miles through dense forest, and only occasion-

ally does one come upon a farmhouse in some small clearing, or a roadside tavern where a meal or bed can be obtained. Farther east it emerges from the forest to follow the St. Lawrence River all the way to Lower Canada. A number of settlers have built their homes along the river, and I must say we found that portion of the road less lonely."

"I'm sure I would not have cared for the long stagecoach journey, nor would I have liked to suffer from a lame back at the end of it."

"Nonsense, Lolly. A few aching bones is a small price to pay for the pleasure I derived from the journey. The view along the river is magnificent. The St. Lawrence is dotted with so many islands that at certain points it seemed no wider than the Niagara, and one frequently saw Indians paddling close to shore in their canoes. The return journey was particularly enjoyable because the trees on the islands had changed colour, and the brilliant hues of their leaves — red, gold, pale yellow — were reflected in the water."

"The scenery must indeed have been magnificent if it surpassed the beauty of our own Niagara River! How many days did you ride in the stagecoach, James?"

"We were four days going from Kingston to Montreal, and longer on the return journey. Unfortunately, a heavy rainstorm set in after we left Montreal, and before we reached the area of the Long Sault Rapids, where the road runs close to the river, some of the low portions of it had become a kind of quagmire. It appeared to be almost bottomless in places, and the wheels of the vehicle sank so low in the mud that the horses experienced great difficulty in drawing it forward."

"Were you and Richard alone in the coach?"

"No, my dear, there were three other passengers. Time after time we were thrown from our seats as the driver urged his horses to almost impossible effort. Everyone was uncomfortably cold. The dampness seemed to penetrate through our clothing and attack our bones. Rain beat against the windows all of that dreary day, and as afternoon wore on I began to wonder how we should fare when darkness set in, if we should be forced

to spend the night confined in the coach. When I endeavoured to call the driver to inquire what he planned to do, he seemed not to hear me, although I shouted as loudly as I could. He was so well wrapped in his oilskins, against the rain and wind, that I daresay he heard nothing."

"Poor dear! You must have been most uncomfortable, and yet you say you enjoyed the journey." Laura laid the bottle of emollient aside and straightened from her task, stretching her arms to relax the muscles.

"It was extremely cold, yes, but fortunately Richard produced a bottle of rum which he passed to each of us in turn, saying we must drink a mouthful to ward off the chill. Although I hadn't been looking forward to the hours immediately ahead with any degree of pleasure, I found that the warmth of the rum made me feel more cheerful about our doubtful situation. We had begun to discuss the benefit to be derived from a second drink of rum when suddenly we heard a shout from the driver, and the coach lurched to a quick stop that sent us tumbling against each other again. We could see a lighted candle in the window of a farmhouse close by when he opened the coach door and announced that we had arrived at Tom Wotherspoon's place. Tom would give us a meal, and afterward we could spend the night in the farm kitchen, he said."

"When I was preparing to alight from the coach, he cautioned me to watch my step, saying, 'The mud will be over your boot tops, Sir,' as indeed it was. One by one, we struggled from the vehicle and made our way as best we could toward the light. The door was opened before we reached it and a man came toward us carrying a lantern. In a hearty voice he invited us to enter his small house. I shall never forget the cosy warmth of that kitchen, Lolly, or the farmer's pretty young wife, hurrying to set places for us at her table, the good smell of beef stew simmering in a pot on the stove."

"What would you have done had you not discovered the farmhouse? Would you have stayed all night in the coach? Methinks you'd have needed more than Richard's bottle of rum to keep you warm on such a wet night. The

mere thought of such a predicament makes me shudder." Laura shrugged her shoulders.

"I think not, my dear. When we went on the next morning we saw one or two other houses within a few miles of the Wotherspoon place. I expect we would have stopped at one of them if we had not seen the light in Tom's window. The sun was shining when we started out, and the scenery was particularly impressive. We soon forgot our discomfort. The stagecoach road is narrow and has many potholes, but I'm sure it will be improved as people travel along it more often. Tom Wotherspoon told me that each farmer in his district is required by law to care for that portion of the highway which runs past his land. He and his neighbours have cut down a number of trees and intend to lay them across the low sections in order to build a good corduroy foundation for the part that is his responsibility. Believe me, Lolly, travel by stagecoach is definitely an improvement over travel by batteaux, or riding a horse from Montreal to Kingston."

Richard had fared very well on the journey, James said. For a man of his bulk he admitted to no particular discomfort from the long hours spent in the cramped area of the coach. He displayed so much energy and vigour in his movements, was so enthusiastic about the new stagecoach service that their companions had at first refused to believe that Richard was fifteen years older than James. In his pompous tone he had insisted that the service must be extended to York as soon as possible. He encouraged his companions to use whatever influence they might have to bring about such an extension and said he intended to mention the matter at the next meeting of the Legislature.

"Were you able to conclude a satisfactory arrangement for shipping the potash cakes to England?" Laura asked presently.

"Yes. It seems there is an excellent market for it there. I am led to believe that there are more and more commercial needs for potash other than as an ingredient for the flint glass that has been used for so many years in making crystal chandeliers." James spoke with enthusiasm.

"Potash is used to make crystal? Do you mean those dull gray cakes of pot ashes you buy from the settlers' wives? Are they really used to make something as beautiful as crystal glass? That is indeed surprising!"

Among the family presents which James brought from Montreal were the ice skates Mary and Charlotte had asked for. Watson's pond, near the road that led to St. David's, was a favourite winter gathering place for adults as well as children, and one brisk morning in the early winter James bundled Laura and the two girls into the sleigh. Upon arrival at the pond he tethered his horses to a stump fence by the roadside and slipped feed bags over their heads, while Mary and Charlotte, in fur hats and tippets, danced with excitement on the crusted snow.

James adjusted the new skates to their boots, buckled the straps securely, and watched them walk toward the ice on wavering ankles, unable to wait while he fastened his runners and helped Laura with hers. Mary slipped, slid onto the ice with a rush, lost her balance, and sat down suddenly. Charlotte, smaller and more agile, avoided her prostrate sister and glided over the ice, pushing one foot ahead of the other with great confidence until she, too, tumbled. Sprawled on the gleaming surface, her hat and tippet tossed aside, she giggled and shouted to Mary until her father came to set her on her feet. Laura rescued Mary and brushed the snow from her clothing, and when James and Charlotte reached them all four linked arms to skate round the pond together.

"Look, Mama, how the sun makes the snow sparkle!" Mary exclaimed as they glided up and down the pond.

"Yes, dear, and have you noticed the grotesque shadow shapes which the stump fence makes on the snow, and how blue they are now?" Laura replied.

"Please, Papa, may we skate here again tomorrow?" Charlotte begged, as her father unfastened the runners from her boots in preparation for the drive home.

"I have business at Newark tomorrow, but if the day is suitable I shall ask Bob to drive you. You'll be safe

with him," James promised.

By the time they reached home the shadows had begun to lengthen, and the girls speculated happily on what Fan would have prepared for dinner.

"I'm starving," Mary said. "I hope she has made venison stew."

"And currant scones with apple butter," Charlotte added.

"I've had such a happy day," Mary said as James helped her from the sleigh.

Laura smiled as the children raced each other to the door. "It was a happy day. Thank you, dear," she said.

Chapter 14

The Last Summer of Peace

The Cartwrights came back to Queenston in July and brought word of recent new developments south of the border. The Embargo Act, more injurious to the people of the United States than to the English, had been repealed at the request of an angry Congress. Mr. James Madison had succeeded Mr. Thomas Jefferson as President, and certain groups of citizens were beginning to talk freely of American annexation of Upper Canada.

"I was not particularly apprehensive of war while Mr. Jefferson was at the head of the government," Richard said. "On the other hand, this new president, Mr. Madison, is less likely to make as great an effort to avoid open conflict. Many people in New York and Boston are convinced that the slightest untoward incident could provoke the war hawks into forcing the new Congress to a declaration of war."

They sat on the wide covered porch that spread across the front of the Cartwright house in the dusk of a warm evening, the Dexters, Nelleses, Hamiltons, Laura, James, Madge, and Richard.

"In my opinion it behooves the government to order more intensive training of the militia now." James spoke emphatically. "The Loyalists in the peninsula have been drilling intermittently for some time, but without any really concrete plan for regular instruction."

"That situation will be rectified shortly, James," his brother-in-law assured him. "I was present in the Legislative Assembly when the matter was brought to the attention of the members, and I think I can tell you that supervised training of the militia by army officers will begin before the end of summer."

There was a certain urgency in the tone of William Nelles's voice as he spoke. "I am very glad to hear it, Richard. We are particularly vulnerable to American attack in the Niagara peninsula."

While they talked David Pickett came by to tell Laura that Elizabeth's time had come; he was on his way to fetch the midwife.

"I must go at once. She will need me." Laura folded the scarf of crimson wool she had been knitting, rose from her seat, and asked to be excused.

"Let me come with you," Mary Dexter begged.

Laura shook her head. "No, Mary. It is too close to your own time of confinement. Wait until tomorrow. I'll send you word as soon as the baby is delivered."

In the darkness of the carriage, as James urged his horses to a trot, she said, "I'm more concerned for Elizabeth than I have ever been for myself when the ordeal was upon me. Does that seem strange to you, James? Is this the way it is when a loved one must suffer unavoidable pain? Did Mistress Sally experience anxiety for me? Shall I feel this way about my daughters when they've grown to womanhood and married?"

James removed one hand from the reins and placed it over hers on the seat between them. "I should think it is natural to feel concern for one's sister, but you must not let her see that you're troubled. Try to appear calm. Don't allow her to sense your uneasiness."

Elizabeth's son was born early the following morning, and before the midwife had finished bathing him, Robert Dexter knocked on the door. He had driven Mary home from the Cartwrights because she suddenly began to feel ill, he informed Laura, while they waited in the Picketts' sitting room. Madge Cartwright had followed as soon as their friends said goodnight. She thought his wife would not need the midwife's services until the

morning but Mary had wakened in great pain, an hour ago, and begged him to fetch her immediately. "Please see if she can leave your sister now," he urged, impatiently.

"Be patient, Robert! She will go with you as soon as she can," Laura assured him. "I'm so glad that Madge is with Mary. She is such a wise person, so calm, so strong. She'll give your wife the courage she needs. Tell Mary I'll see her as soon as possible. I shall stay here for a day or two until Lizzie Dean's sister comes to help Elizabeth with the housekeeping."

Mary Dexter's baby died within a few hours of birth and Laura's first visit to her was a difficult one. Weak, wan, desolate, the younger woman burst into tears at sight of her friend. "What am I to do?" she moaned, when Laura bent over the bed to kiss her. "All through those long months while I carried her within my body I longed for the day when my daughter would be born, not once thinking she might die. Now I have no child, nothing to live for. I wish I could die, too."

"Hush, Mary, please! What would Robert think if he could hear you? Does he not need your love? Surely you must want to live for his sake!" Laura's tone was stern. She took a fresh handkerchief from her pocket, gently dabbed at the tear-wet face, and thrust the bit of linen into Mary's hand. "The fact that the baby was alive when she was born is a good omen. I had a talk with Dr. Spencely yesterday, when he called to see Elizabeth. He tells me there is no physical reason for you not to bear other children who will be strong and healthy. Please try not to brood about the baby's death. Wipe your eyes, lie back and try to relax while I brew you a cup of tea to steady those nerves."

"Thank you, Lolly. You and Madge Cartwright have been so very kind to me. You make me think of my Aunt Shipman."

"Then get well quickly to please us. Try to be cheerful for Robert's sake. Don't hurt him by mourning constantly for the baby you both wanted so much. He needs to be assured of your love. He must be feeling desolate also."

“Don’t misunderstand me, Lolly. I love Robert, and I don’t want to hurt him. I’m afraid I have not been able to think of anything except that my baby is dead. I wanted so much to have a child. I had made so many plans for us. Why, why, did it have to be like this?” Her voice broke and she buried her face against the pillow. “I don’t think I can bear it,” she sobbed.

Laura tucked the coverlet around the slender shoulders, brushed Mary’s forehead with her fingers in a quick caress, and went to the kitchen to make tea. She was deeply concerned about her friend’s depression, and while she waited for the kettle to boil tried to decide how best to cope with it. I shall insist that she stay with us when Robert goes to York next week, she decided. Perhaps the children will help her to shake off this feeling of despondency. It isn’t good for her to be alone just now. She returned to the bedroom to find Mary fast asleep, head resting on one arm, her face tear-wet again. She placed the tray on a low table, poured a cup of tea for herself, covered the pot with a woollen tea cosy, and sat down near the window to wait until her friend awakened.

A year later, when Laura’s seventh child was a few weeks old, she received an urgent letter from Mistress Sally. “Your father has been ill for some time, and seems to make no progress toward recovery. He speaks of you constantly, is impatient to see you. Please try to come to us soon,” her stepmother wrote.

Alarmed by the gravity of the message, Laura tried to decide what she must do. Appy, the new baby, seemed to require much more attention than any of the other children; she was often ill and fretful. Charles was two, scarcely more than an infant. Both were much too young to be left with Fan, yet how could she take them to her father’s house if he were as ill as Mistress Sally had implied!

When she consulted James he insisted that she must make the journey to Port Credit as soon as it was possible to go. “Your sister, Elizabeth, has been begging you to visit her ever since she and David moved to York. I

should think she will be more than pleased to keep Charles and Laura with her while you go on to the Credit to see your father. Fan will take good care of the other girls. Mary and Charlotte are quite old enough now to help the younger ones with their meals, and we can ask Mary Dexter to look in on them. You will take the baby with you, of course, but with Ma Davis to care for her while she is in your father's house, you should be free to spend as much time as you would like with him." He placed an arm about her shoulders and with his forefinger endeavoured to erase the lines of worry from her brow. "Don't fret, my dear. The children will be quite safe in Fan's care. You and your father have had a very fine relationship through the years and he has a great affection for you. I think you owe him this visit."

"Thank you, James," Laura said, her face pressed against his shoulder. "You're a very understanding man and I love you for it."

"William Nelles will be going to York on the ship that sails next Tuesday. If you can be ready I'm sure he will be glad to see you safely to your sister's house. Perhaps David Pickett can arrange to accompany you to Port Credit."

On the evening of her arrival at York Laura and her sister sat before the fire in the Pickett sitting room, and talked until the candles burned low in their holders. There was a hint of uneasiness in Elizabeth's voice as she spoke of their father. "Papa is far from well. Our mother says he has become quite despondent and worries constantly about the estate at Ingersoll for which he held no proper deed. I hope your visit will cheer him."

Although warned by her sister, Laura was not prepared for the change she saw in her father, his wasted appearance, the feebleness of his walk, his gray, strained face and halting words of greeting.

When she bent to kiss him upon her arrival, his face brightened. "It is good to see you, Laura. I've been hoping you would come." His eyes smiled, wistfully, as he hesitated over the words in an effort to enunciate each one clearly.

"Ma Davis thinks he has suffered a stroke," Mistress

Sally confided to Laura when they were able to talk alone. "Have you noticed how difficult it is for him to speak?"

"Has a doctor been consulted?" Laura asked.

"There is no doctor at Port Credit, and your father has not been able to travel to York. David Pickett has spoken about him to the physician who attends Elizabeth and her children. He has promised to call as soon as he can. I'm afraid we shall have to be patient until he comes. Your father was so happy to see you, Laura. I'm sure your visit will be good for him."

Wearied by the excitement of Laura's arrival and the effort of talking, Thomas retired to his bed early in the evening. Some of the strain had disappeared from his face, Laura thought, when she entered his room to bid him goodnight and found him peacefully asleep. It was a sleep from which he did not waken.

"It seems as if the Master was just waiting for you to come, Miss Laura," Ma Davis said. She brushed a wisp of whitening hair from her eyes, sprinkled dried rose leaves into a bowl of water and began to prepare the body for burial. Her hand trembled and tears mingled with the rose-scented water as she sponged the dead face of the man she had known for so many years.

"He often came into the kitchen, these last weeks, sometimes just to sit quiet like, or to talk with Mary and me about the old days when you were a little girl, the days when we lived at Great Barrington. When Mary died a month ago he was terribly upset, and the day after she was buried he had a stroke. He hasn't been quite himself since then. I didn't want to alarm the Mistress, but I thought he was not long for this world. I hoped you'd come in time. He wanted so much to see you again."

"He was a good, kind father," Laura said, through her tears.

Richard Cartwright, at York for a session of the Legislative Council, rode to Port Credit a few weeks later to express his sympathy to Laura and her mother. Mistress Sally sat wide-eyed, tearful in her husband's favourite chair, and listened silently as Richard and Laura talked.

"Thomas was held in high esteem by all who knew him, as a just and fair magistrate. The loss of his property at Ingersoll was a very frustrating experience for him, one from which I'm afraid he never really recovered. I think he hoped, as I did, that he might one day reclaim it. I suppose incidents of that kind were inevitable during the influx of such large numbers of settlers to Upper Canada. I wish he need not have been among the unfortunate ones."

He took a tobacco pouch from his pocket, filled his pipe, and drew on it deeply as Laura held a lighted taper to its bowl. In a moment he sat down beside Mistress Sally, easing his great bulk into an overstuffed chair. His long legs were stretched before him as he began to counsel her about the settlement of her husband's estate.

"Dear, kind Richard," Laura said, as she bade him goodbye. "You've helped my mother more than you know. Thank you, sincerely."

"Come back to Queenston soon, my dear," he admonished her. "I don't like the situation that is developing below the border. If President Madison should declare war on Great Britain, as many people think he may do, we in Upper Canada will undoubtedly have to defend ourselves against attack. A feeling of alarm is growing at Kingston, at York, and all through the Niagara peninsula. Unfortunately, the number of regular troops stationed in Upper Canada is extremely small because of England's war with Napoleon, although I'll wager that under the command of Isaac Brock they are more skillfully trained than the Yankees. It was rumoured in the Assembly last week that General Brock is about to be named acting Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada. I sincerely hope there is some truth in the statement. He is a dedicated soldier. Everyone who has heard the story speaks with approval of such an appointment. The consensus of opinion is that we need a leader who is a man of sound thinking, one who can make decisions wisely and quickly, if we are to resist Yankee invasion."

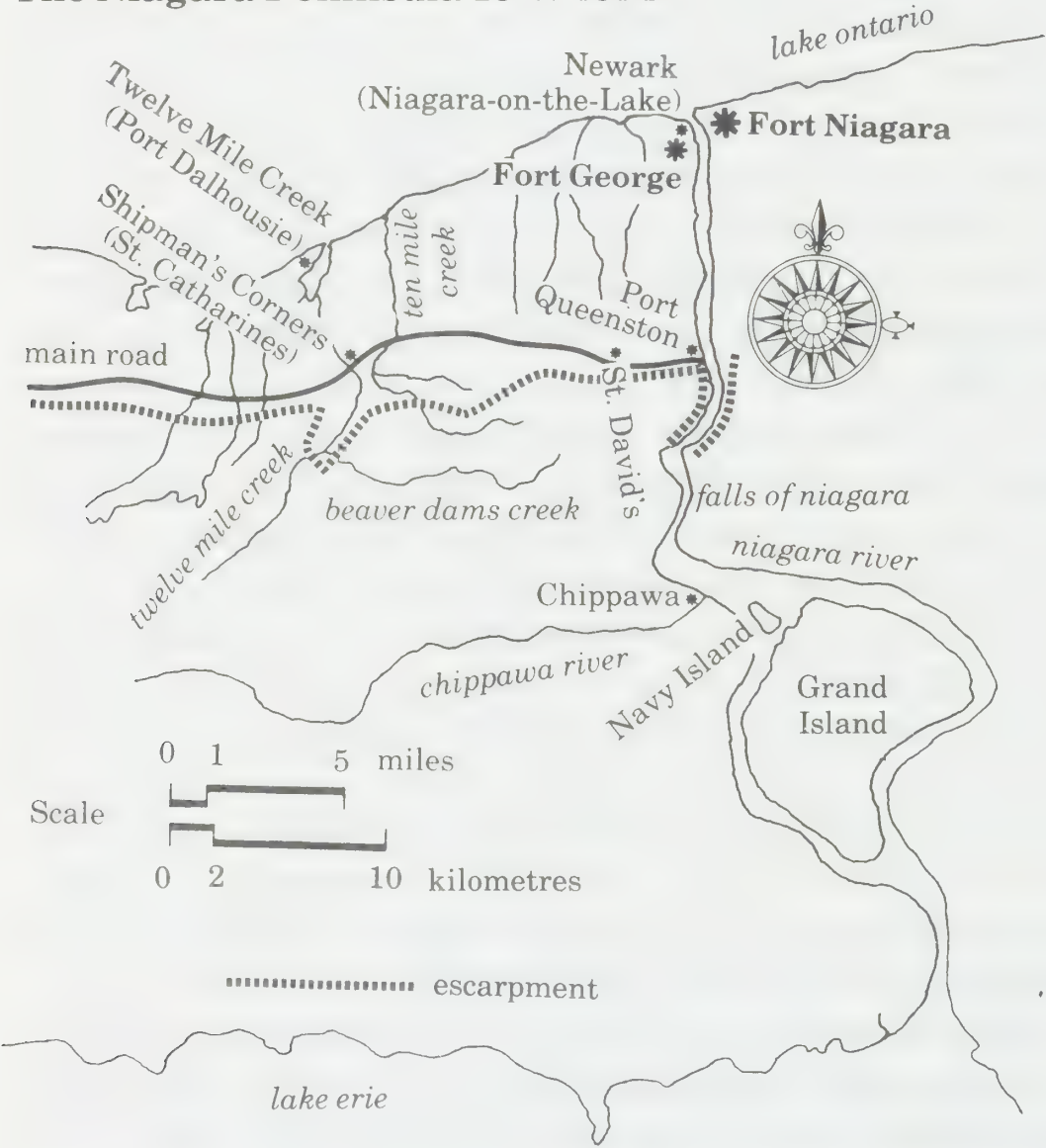
"And what of the militia, Richard?" Laura asked.

"Every able-bodied man between sixteen and sixty is being recruited, drilled, and trained in the use of war

weapons. Believe me, Laura, the Loyalists intend to defend their country to the last man if need be. Your James is in the thick of recruitment exercises at Queenston, and is almost fanatical in his determination that the Yankees must be kept out of Canada. Go home soon, my dear. He needs you.”

“I’ve been loath to leave my mother while her grief is so fresh because she tends to lean on me for comfort and advice. My brother Charles is expected to arrive home in a few days, and will take my father’s place as head of the household. When he comes I shall be free to return to Queenston. I’m sure James as well as my children must be needing me. She smiled, and shook hands with her brother-in-law. “If you should go to Queenston before I do tell James I miss him very much.”

The Niagara Peninsula 1812-1814



Part 3

A Futile War 1812 – 1814

Chapter 15

An Eventful Day in October 1812

The evening of 21 June 1813, was hot and still at Queenston. The air was stifling in the bedroom where the Secord children were trying, unsuccessfully, to go to sleep. One by one they claimed Laura's attention with trivial demands. Driven by the urgency of her need to talk with James, she had been impatient with them until it became apparent that they were too confused by the

strange events of the day to relax quickly and settle down for the night.

She helped Charlotte braid her long black hair, fetched a drink of water for Hannah, bathed Laura's hot little face with a cool wet cloth. Careful not to allow any trace of anxiety to creep into her voice, she told them a rambling story which at last seemed to satisfy them. They went back to their beds quietly and she kissed each one goodnight. She was about to leave the room when Appy whimpered softly, "Mama, my head is hurting."

Laura hesitated for an instant and then bent over the cot to stroke the child's hot forehead, uncertain whether she was ill or merely feverish from the exhausting heat. After a moment she gathered the small girl into her arms and sat down in a worn rocking chair that stood near the door. "There, there," she soothed Appy.

Although it was imperative that she speak to James as soon as possible about the conversation she had overheard in the dining room, she knew that the information must not be disclosed until she was assured that they could talk without interruption from the children. No one except James must know what she had learned until they were able to decide upon a course of action.

"I wish we could have gone to the Heights tonight, Mama. It is always so much cooler on the hill." Harriet got up from her cot and tiptoed across the floor to stand beside her mother's chair.

Laura sighed as she reached out to smooth a hand over Harriet's cheek. "Go back to bed, dear," she said. "I think Appy will fall asleep if we are quiet."

Idly, she wiped beads of perspiration from her face with a pocket handkerchief, thinking of past summer evenings when she, James, and the children had walked hand in hand along the headland that rose in a sheer cliff above the Niagara River. The cool softness of a breeze that seemed to stir constantly on the Heights had always had a magical effect upon everyone. By the time they reached home the children would be quite ready to tumble into their cots and fall asleep.

She rocked back and forth in the ladder-back rocker, softly hummed a lullaby to soothe small Appy, and

reflected that those happy excursions had ceased when war began. Their whole pattern of living seemed different now.

When she had returned to Queenston after her father's death she had become aware of the change, the growing tensions. James and all his friends were drilling long hours with the militia, and although war had not yet been declared everyone waited with uneasy expectancy for the fighting to begin. Friendly gatherings at the homes of their neighbours, the pleasant hours spent in conversation or in sharpening their wits at charades and card games, had come to an end because the men were too busy practising the art of war to indulge in trifling amusements.

For weeks James had returned home night after night, exhausted after hours of drilling, and fallen asleep as soon as his head touched his pillow. When she protested that he would become ill, he had answered impatiently, "This is not a time for illness. We are on the brink of war. The Yankees may march into Upper Canada at any moment, and when they do we must be ready to drive them back."

His prediction came true all too soon. The Yankees had invaded Upper Canada within the week. For a few moments, as she sat in the stifling nursery, rocking Appy, she relived in memory the eventful October day when the enemy first attacked Queenston.

Wakened by the heavy boom of cannon she had pulled back a curtain to peer out of her bedroom window where a sudden driving rain was beating against the glass in the predawn blackness. From the river came the persistent rattle of gunfire.

The noise had disturbed her children, and while she endeavoured to quiet them Fan and Bob came running from their quarters, almost hysterical with fear. She had reassured them as well as she could, sent Bob to rekindle the sitting room fire, and ordered Fan to brew a pot of tea while a mounting alarm grew in her heart. James had not come home, and she had no means of knowing

whether he was with General Brock at Fort George, or in command of a company of militia at the landing place below the village where he would be in the thick of the fighting.

Eventually the children went back to sleep. Unable to rest, Laura had kept watch at the window until, out of the mist and fog of early dawn, she saw General Brock gallop past on his great gray stallion. She remembered that her anxiety seemed to dissolve when she recognized the General. James and all their Loyalist friends placed the greatest possible confidence in Isaac Brock's ability as a soldier and she was certain the Yankees must have been driven back across the river.

She was about to return to bed when she heard the sound of footsteps and saw General Brock run down the hill, the scarlet and gold of his uniform plainly visible in the morning light. His horse, Alfred, trotted beside him and a dozen or more men followed close on his heels. Others joined them as they ran. Puzzled by the crackle of musket fire from the direction of the Heights where she knew the two lone British guns were mounted, she wondered what could have gone wrong. James had assured her that it was impossible for the enemy to gain access to the hill from the river, and yet the sound of gunfire at such close range must mean that a battle was being fought there. She had knelt beside her bed for a very long time, she remembered, unable to pray, too numbed by a frantic terror to think, while the guns continued to crackle.

Suddenly, she had heard shouts, the sound of angry voices, and in a few moments James came into the house, followed by two of his men. In their arms they carried the limp form of their leader.

"General Brock is dead." James's voice trembled as he made the announcement. "When we reached the Heights we found the Yankees had seized the British guns. Someone must have led them along the footpath that follows the river upstream. It would have been impossible for them to have found their way through the woods to the top of the hill unless a man familiar with the trail showed them the way."

Angrily, he had denounced the traitor.

"When we realized the enemy were two or three hundred strong on the Heights, General Brock decided to attack from the rear. We came back down to the village for reinforcements, climbed the hill from the other side, drove the Yankees back from the edge of the cliff, and recaptured our guns. Then suddenly the General crumpled and fell. He was dead when we reached him, shot through the heart. I brought him here because it is the nearest place of shelter, and I couldn't leave him lying out there to be trampled upon. I hope you won't mind, Lolly, if we leave him until the battle is over. I'll send some men to take his body to Fort George then."

When the men laid the dead general on the sofa in the library, James closed the door of the room, tightly, patted her shoulder, and said, "I'll come back as soon as I can, my darling," and followed the others out of the house.

The fighting had continued well into the afternoon, and when the guns were silent at last Bob came to tell her that James had been wounded. She remembered that she ran out of the door, her long skirts gathered above her ankles, and hurried across the grass, through the gate, onto the road that led to Queenston Heights. Near the top of the hill she had found him sprawled beside the path, with three enemy soldiers bending over him, their muskets raised menacingly. Her screams of terror diverted their attention as she threw herself across James's body, and when one of the men endeavoured to push her aside her feet had kicked at the man's legs with all the force of her pent up fear and anger. She had continued to scream, unable to stop, until the Yankee commander discovered them, reprimanded his men, and ordered them to carry James down the hill to the house. Not until they had placed him on his bed had she been certain that he was alive. Later in the day, while she was engaged in bathing his wound, Bob came in to tell her that, miraculously, the British had been able to hold Queenston and the enemy were struggling back across the river.

She recalled the atmosphere of uneasy peace in

which the people of Upper Canada had lived through the winter months, awaiting the enemy's next move. In the spring the Yankees had returned to attack and capture the Town of York. Now they were in possession of Queenston!

Harriet's plaintive voice interrupted her reverie, brought her back with a start to the problem uppermost in her mind. "Mama, Mama, you're not listening to me."

"I'm sorry, darling. I was thinking of something else. It would be cooler on the Heights, I'm sure, but the Yankee soldiers won't allow us to go beyond the gate."

"I don't like the Yankees. Why are they staying in our house, Mama?"

Before Laura could reply Mary answered Harriet's question. "I know why they're here. It is because of the war, isn't it, Mama? We're prisoners of the Yankees. If Papa weren't sick they would probably have sent him across the river with the other men. Bob told me that they took several Queenston people away this morning."

"Hush, Mary. Don't upset the little ones. I want them to get to sleep. Your father is waiting for me to dress his wound."

"You look so distressed, Mama. Is Papa's fever bad again?" Mary whispered the question, her blue eyes searching Laura's face.

"He's depressed, Mary, impatient because he is unable to fight for his country, angry too, because we've been forced to billet the Yankee officers in our home."

Although Mary was fourteen and quite dependable, Laura dared not disclose the reason for her anxiety. The news she had overheard in the dining room was too dangerous a secret to be entrusted to anyone except James.

"Poor Papa! I wish his leg would get well. We used to have such lovely times together before he was wounded. Now, everything seems to upset him. I wish the war would stop, don't you, Mama?"

"Indeed I do, Mary. Don't be impatient with your father. His wound is not healing as it should, and when the pain is severe he becomes upset and irritated. If he is

curt or abrupt sometimes, we must overlook it. We know he loves us all very much."

Charles climbed out of his bed, ran to his mother, and climbed on her lap. "Please tell me another story, Mama," he begged.

Laura stroked the boy's curly head, affectionately. He was barely five, and her only son. She would have liked to indulge him. Regretfully she shook her head and a finger touched her lips in a gesture of silence. "I've got to make your Papa comfortable now," she whispered. "If you promise to speak quietly and not get out of your bed again, you may ask Mary to tell you one story. Appy has fallen asleep and you must be careful not to wake her."

Before she could rise Mary leaned over the rocking chair, pushed the white cap back from her mother's forehead, and stroked the pale brown hair. "Your hair is beautiful, Mama. I think you're so pretty!"

"You'll be pretty one day soon, darling." Laura kissed the eager young face.

Careful not to disturb the sleeping child, she placed Appy on her cot, kissed the others, cautioned Mary not to allow them to leave the nursery, and hurried away to the kitchen.

Fan was washing dishes. Under her breath the girl mumbled, as she worked, about the arrogant demands of the Yankee soldiers.

"Missus," she complained when she saw Laura, "the officers say I have to do their washing. They want their breakfast before five o'clock. Do I have to obey their orders?"

"I'm afraid so, Fan. You must do whatever they ask. I don't want to have any more trouble." She lifted a steaming kettle from the stove, poured hot water into a basin and found clean towels in a cupboard.

"Be sure to let the fire die down now," she admonished the girl. "You know the Yankees have forbidden us to burn either candles or a fire after nightfall. Those are the Yankee leader's orders."

"You goin' to bathe Master James again?" Fan asked. "You think all those baths are good for a sick man?"

"They help to reduce the fever, relax him. He is usually able to sleep after his bath."

Bob had been crouching behind the stove. Now, as she turned to leave the kitchen, he limped toward her. "Missus," he whimpered, "thank you for serving the officers' dinner."

"I was glad to do it for you, Bob. I'm sure you'll be able to serve them tomorrow. I'm so sorry about the beating the Yankee officer gave you. Do the bruises hurt badly?"

"Yassum. Oh, Missus, I'm scared of those men. I don't want to have anything to do with them. Please, Missus, don't make me serve their meals tomorrow."

Laura placed a hand on the black man's arm. "Bob, listen to me. I've spoken to the officer who is in command. He has given me his word that you won't be beaten again, but you must obey his orders while he and his men are billeted here. I expect you to serve their meals while they are in our house."

Bob looked up when he heard the tone of firm authority in Laura's voice. "Yassum," he said.

With basin and towels in hand she left the kitchen and climbed the stairs to the bedroom she shared with her husband. At last, she was free to talk with James! Together they must plan a course of action and find a way to thwart the Yankees.

Chapter 16

Plot to Foil the Enemy

When she bent over the bed to brush caressing fingers across his forehead James thrust her hand away and said irritably, "I thought you would never come. The hours pass so slowly when a man is incapacitated and alone, with only angry thoughts for company."

"I'm sorry, James. You must be uncomfortable, too. The children were upset and I thought it best to wait until they settled down so that you and I could talk without interruption from them. I have some very grave news for you."

She set the basin on a low table beside the bed, and while removing the bandage from his leg repeated the conversation she had overheard in the dining room. James interrupted before she had finished, in a voice rough with the urgency of his alarm. "No, No. We've got to block the Yankees' plan. If they should succeed in taking Beaver Dams, and the supplies that are stored there, we may very well lose all of Upper Canada. Someone must go immediately to warn Lieutenant Fitzgibbon."

"Hush! The guard may hear you," Laura whispered and hurried to close the open window. She was relieved to observe that the man on duty outside the house had left his post near the door and was talking with the sentry at the gate, too far away to have overheard her husband's angry outburst.

The day had been endlessly long, for her as well as for James. She had coped with one disturbing incident after another until now her nerves were on edge. Suddenly, as she drew the curtain across the windowpanes, her hands began to tremble and she stood clinging to the fabric for a moment, willing herself to be calm, praying silently for strength and courage with which to meet the next emergency.

When the Yankee officer had pounded on their door early that morning, requesting rooms for his men, she had demurred until he informed her that James was a prisoner. He would be permitted to remain with his family only on condition that the Americans could be billeted in the Secord house. Her servants must prepare meals for them and keep their rooms in order. He had insisted that she supervise the children's activities closely, had forbidden them to go beyond the garden gate or enter the rooms to be occupied by his men. He had questioned her about the villagers, remarking that many of the houses seemed to be unoccupied, and she had told him only that some of the men had been taken prisoner. She had refrained from mentioning that the others were, in all probability, with the British troops at Burlington Heights, their families safe with relatives.

She was proud of the manner in which the children had behaved. Mary and Charlotte amused the younger ones and played games with them in the garden. Surprisingly, they asked very few questions about the men who had taken possession of their home until Bob had incurred the displeasure of one of the officers.

The episode had been a terrifying experience for everyone, the children, Fan, and most of all for faithful Bob. One man, more arrogant than the others, had accused him of wilful disobedience, flown into a rage because the black man was slow to obey an order, and beaten him savagely, unwilling to understand that Bob, confused by the presence of so many soldiers, was unable to function normally.

In angry indignation, Laura sought out the commanding officer to protest the brutal attack. "Bob has been our faithful, respected servant for years," she said.

"No one has ever beaten him during the time he has been with us. It is shocking and unforgivable that a bad-tempered soldier would be permitted to mistreat a defenceless man. Your officer is undeserving of his rank."

She was acutely aware of the man's appraising eyes on her angry face and trembling shoulders, although he listened without interruption while she talked. When she had finished he stammered, "I'm sorry, Ma'am. I agree that it is a most regrettable incident. My man was entirely at fault and has been reprimanded severely. I promise you there will be no further beatings."

Bob's back was raw, bleeding. He limped badly from the blows to his leg. Like a frightened animal he had crawled into a corner behind the kitchen stove and Laura was unable to persuade him to allow her to examine the welts on his body. Consequently, when the officers filed into the dining room in the early evening she, rather than Bob, was waiting to serve their supper.

The men were in a gay mood, talking freely about their plans for the conquest of Upper Canada, and commenting that they were in fact doing the inhabitants a favour by freeing them from British domination.

Laura moved among them quietly. She passed steaming dishes of Fan's well-cooked food and filled and refilled the wine glasses. Her impassive face, her downcast eyes, gave no hint of the indignation that seethed within her, no sign that she was listening intently to the conversation.

"A council of war was held at Fort Niagara," the officer in command informed his men. "An officer from Maryland, a Colonel Boerstler, had been ordered to take Beaver Dams and capture that rogue Fitzgibbon as soon as possible."

"I've heard the Lieutenant is a wily fellow," one man commented. "His midnight sorties are particularly demoralizing to our militia. I'm told his men steal into camp at night when our soldiers are asleep, take their guns, powder, and food, and disappear without the guards being aware of their presence. We'll have to be as resourceful as he is in order to capture him."

"Colonel Boerstler is expected to arrive here tomor-

row with six hundred and fifty men, a company of artillery, two field guns, a troop of dragoons, and mounted infantry as well. We shall outnumber the enemy by ten to one. With those odds our assignment should be an easy one." The commanding officer spoke positively.

"Lieutenant Fitzgibbon is a man to be reckoned with. We must not underestimate him even though our scouts tell me that he has fewer than fifty men at Beaver Dams," the other officer warned.

The commanding officer rose from his chair and made certain that he had the undivided attention of every man at the table. "We shall take Beaver Dams, never fear, and Ten Mile Creek as well. Major De Haren will surrender without firing a shot when he sees the strength of our detachment. We'll take him to Beaver Dams with us, and when we've captured Fitzgibbon our men will search out the stocks of food and ammunition the British are said to have stored somewhere near his headquarters. I've no doubt Colonel Boerstler will march on to Burlington then. If we take Fitzgibbon and capture Burlington Heights Upper Canada will be ours."

After what had seemed to Laura an endless period of time the officers left the table and one by one began to straggle out of the house, across the grass to the gate and down the road to the tavern. Replete with food and wine, they paid scant attention, as they left the dining room, to the slender woman who busied herself at the sideboard, sorting plates and cutlery, her white-capped head bent low over the task.

Laura's heart beat rapidly and her pulses throbbed as she waited for the last man to withdraw. While she cleared dishes from the table, replaced chairs, and helped Fan prepare the children's tea she tried to decide what to do. Angered and alarmed by the words the Yankee officer had spoken so confidently of the intended conquest of Upper Canada, of his certainty of victory, she was determined to thwart the plans if possible. Although hesitant to upset James, she decided he would have to be told; he would know how best to warn the British.

Now, in response to James's angry words, 'We must warn Lieutenant Fitzgibbon immediately,' as she closed

the window and stood there, trembling, her own role became startlingly clear. She would have to go to Beaver Dams! There was no other alternative.

"We must send Bob into the village with a message as soon as it becomes quite dark," James said.

Laura shook her head. "No, darling. Bob is terrified of the Yankee soldiers. He would never get past the sentry at the gate, and if he did succeed in reaching the village it would be a useless errand. There is nobody at Queenston tonight whom we could depend upon to warn Lieutenant Fitzgibbon. Every Loyalist who was in the village yesterday has either escaped to Burlington or been sent across the river, a prisoner of the Yankees."

She paused a moment, as if hesitant to commit herself, and then said in a firm voice, "James, I'm the only person who can alert the Lieutenant. I shall have to go to Beaver Dams."

"You, Laura! Will you not be afraid?"

"Yes, terribly afraid, but you are the only person who will know that. I will gladly do anything I can to defeat the Yankees and bring peace back to Upper Canada."

"There'll be peace again, never fear." James reached out his hand and stroked her soft hair while she bathed the infected wound and applied a fresh dressing. "You're very brave, Laura. I wish someone else, some man could go to Beaver Dams instead of you. If I could walk that far ..."

"If you could walk you would be with the British troops, and not a prisoner in your own home," Laura interrupted, and added, "I'm very glad we're all together."

The guard rapped on the door, and when Fan answered it and said that her mistress was upstairs he was content to go away without speaking to her. Startled by the sound, James shook his fist in the gathering darkness and muttered incoherently while Laura smoothed his pillows and straightened his bed. When she had made him comfortable she sat down beside him with her hand in his while they talked in whispers, discussing the route she must follow to get to Beaver Dams.

"The only possible way to reach Fitzgibbon ahead of

Boerstler's men is to take the trail through the Black Swamp, Lolly. The old road that leads away from the main one a few yards past Brother Stephen's house at St. David's narrows to the trail that goes through the swamp. It is a lonely route but a safer one. Follow it to Shipman's Corners. When you reach the Corners look for a grass-grown path that leads into the woods. Follow it through the beechwoods until you reach a clearing. The Decew house, where Lieutenant Fitzgibbon is stationed, stands in that clearing. If Colonel Boerstler intends to attack Major de Haren at Ten Mile Creek he is certain to take the main road. Let the Yankees settle down for the night. Come and rest a little while before you go. It will be a tiring journey."

In spite of the stifling heat, Laura shivered. It had not occurred to her that she would have to go through the perilous Black Swamp. No woman, insofar as she was aware, had ever been over that trail. Men avoided it if possible. During the years in which she lived at Queenston she had heard many strange tales about the swamp, a portion of which was a spongy quagmire. It had been said that men sometimes lost their way there and were never seen again.

"Oh, James, not through the Black Swamp," she protested, and quickly placed a hand over her mouth to stifle the sound. "Is there no easier way to reach Beaver Dams?"

"I'm afraid not, Lolly. You daren't take the main road. If you were discovered the Yankees would immediately conclude that you were going to de Haren or Fitzgibbon with information. We can't take that risk. You will reach Shipman's Corners long before the Yankees have gathered their men together. It is unlikely that you will meet anyone, certainly not the Yankee soldiers. Don't be afraid, my darling. You'll be safe enough." He placed an arm around her shoulders and drew her close to him, and she wondered if he could sense the depth of her fear of the hours that lay ahead, the journey she had volunteered to undertake.

While she lay resting with her head against her husband's shoulder, there was a gentle tap at the bedroom

door and Mary tiptoed into the room, a pale shadow in her white nightshift. She held Appy in her arms. "Mama, Appy has been crying again," she said. "What shall I do?"

Laura took the fretful child from Mary's arms. "There, there, baby," she soothed her.

"Can you find her old cradle, Mary? I think it is in the corner near the window. Appy is such a little thing I'm sure she will be quite comfortable in it tonight."

"Shall I rock her, Mama?" Mary asked when her mother had settled Appy in the wooden cradle.

"No, dear. You must go back to your bed." She placed an arm around her daughter's slender waist, and together they groped their way out of the bedroom, across the hall, and into the nursery. "Go to sleep," she said as she smoothed the sheets on Mary's bed and placed a kiss on her forehead.

For a moment she stood at the door in the darkness, listening to assure herself that the other children were asleep. "Goodnight, my darlings," she breathed, and closed it behind her noiselessly.

Chapter 17

Vital Information for the British

When Laura returned to her bedroom Appy was fast asleep, and at James's suggestion she lifted the child from the cradle and placed her in the bed beside him. If she wakened again he would be able to soothe her. It was important, he said, that neither the children nor the unwelcome Yankee officers be disturbed by her fretfulness.

Groping in the darkness, she found a jug that stood on top of the commode, poured water into a basin, washed her face and hands, and found fresh clothing in her wardrobe. She searched among her dresses until she found a second best gown of flowered print, which she pulled on over a brown cotton skirt. When she had brushed her hair and fastened it into a tidy knot, she tied the ribbons of a summer bonnet beneath her chin. James had insisted that she must wear a costume that would be suitable for a social visit, so that if accosted by the sentry her story that she was going to St. David's to take a few delicacies to her sick brother would be credible and could be verified, since Charles Ingersoll was indeed ill at Stephen's house.

Ready at last, she bent over the bed to kiss James goodbye. "It must be time to go," she said quietly.

"Have courage, darling. Don't be afraid." He reached out, pulled her down close to him, and held her tightly in his arms while he kissed her face, her hair and mouth.

After a long moment she drew away; then tiptoed to the door, glad of the darkness so that he could not see her face and know how very fearful she was.

In the kitchen she took a sweetgrass basket from a cupboard, smiling faintly as she recalled that the Indian woman who gave it to her had said the gift would bring her good fortune. A small crock of chicken broth, a pot of strawberry jelly, a crusty load of fresh-baked bread, and two small packets of tea were placed within the basket. When everything was in readiness she removed her house slippers, hid them behind some pieces of wood at the rear of the stove, and thrust her feet into a pair of low-buckled shoes. Ruefully, she reflected that although the footgear was in keeping with her costume, her husband's militia boots would have been more appropriate for the journey she was about to undertake.

She closed the kitchen door behind her softly, stepped out into the warm summer darkness, and slowly, step by step, began to make her way toward the garden gate. In the faint light of the stars familiar objects seemed strange, the night sounds unreal. A restless owl made who-whooping noises in a tree near the house, and from the direction of the barn came the soft nickering of a wakeful horse. A large June moth flicked her face, startling her. When she tripped over a boulder and bruised her toe, an involuntary cry of pain escaped her and she crouched against the rock for a moment, panic-stricken. At last she reached the gate. She fumbled with the wooden fastening, drew it back carefully, slipped through the opening, and as she turned to replace the latch a bulky form loomed out of the darkness.

"What are you doing here, Ma'am?" the sentry demanded. "My orders are to let no one pass through this gate."

The cold steel of his rifle pressed against her chest, uncomfortably, and her voice began to tremble as she answered, "I'm Mrs. Secord. My brother is very ill. I'm going to St. David's to see him."

"I'm sorry, Ma'am. You know I can't let you go." He grasped her arm. "Come now, I'm going to take you back to the house," he said.

Stubbornly, Laura's hands clutched the gate. She made no attempt to move.

"You'd best come, Ma'am. I don't want to get rough with you." His grasp tightened on her arm.

"Please let me pass. What harm can I possibly do? I'm sure your commander will allow me to go when he knows that my brother is ill." She hesitated for an instant, then added boldly, "Shall we ask him?"

The sentry spoke slowly, as if turning the matter over in his mind. "Ma'am," he said, "I daren't ask him just now. It must be close to four o'clock. The colonel will be sound asleep. He's got a fiery temper, Mrs. Secord. The way he tongue-lashed Lieutenant Griggs for beating the black man was something to hear. A real blowing-up, it was. No, Ma'am, I just can't be responsible for waking him at this hour. You go back to the house. I promise you I'll speak to him about you in the morning."

"My errand can't wait until morning. My brother may die. He is dangerously ill. I've got to get to him immediately. If you won't allow me to pass and are afraid to waken your Colonel, I'll have to speak to him myself."

Instantly, the man released his grasp on her arm. "No, no, Ma'am, please don't wake him now. I reckon it will be all right to let you go as far as St. David's."

"Bless you! You're a kind man!" Laura murmured.

She shivered as she listened to the click of the wooden fastening that secured the gate behind her. There seemed to be so much finality in the sound. When she might return, if at all, would depend on the success of her mission. "Dear God, give me courage," she prayed.

Her thoughts were with her family as she stumbled along the St. David's road, the sweetgrass basket dangling on her arm. She knew that James would be anxious about her. Although he had insisted that the Black Swamp trail was safe and tried to lessen her fears and bolster her courage, he was well aware that she had undertaken a dangerous journey. The hours ahead would be uneasy ones for him.

Weeks of forced inactivity and almost constant pain had taken their toll of the man on whose strength she had grown accustomed to lean; had changed him into an

invalid, nervous, depressed and irritable at times, unlike his former self. His wound refused to heal. No amount of bathing or medication seemed to disperse the infection entirely. For eight months he had suffered extreme discomfort, unable to return to the militia or tend his shop. Although she had tried, faithfully, to carry out Dr. Spencely's directions, she has begun to fear, as she suspected James had, that he might never be really well again.

She wondered if Appy's fever had subsided, or whether she was going to be ill again. Appy, the youngest, was, she reflected sadly, the frail one of the seven, often sick and fretful, unlike her other healthy, happy children.

Fan would be rising soon to gather kindling, starting a fire in the kitchen stove, making hot cakes. She hoped the Yankee officers would not have to wait for their breakfast. If they became impatient, or if Bob was slow to serve them, the officer in command might demand her presence!

The road became more easily discernible before she reached St. David's. There was a faint light in the sky, and she was able to increase her pace until she was running, driven by the urgency of her mission. When she came to the village she slowed her steps to a dignified walk in order to avoid attracting the attention of any wakeful citizen as she went toward Stephen Secord's house at the farthest end of the street.

"Oh, Sister, I'm so glad to see you," Ann Secord exclaimed when Laura appeared at her door. "I was hoping you would be able to come. Your brother is very ill. I wish it were possible to get a doctor to look at him."

Laura placed a finger to her lips and whispered, "Are you alone, Ann? I've something to tell you."

"I thought you had come to help me care for Charles."

"I'm sorry, Sister," Laura said. In a low voice she told Ann what she meant to do.

When she had finished, Mrs. Stephen placed a hand on her arm. "You're a brave woman, Laura. I doubt that I would have as much courage," she said.

"It is a question of duty, not courage. I've very little of the latter. I have no choice but to go. There is no man or woman left at Queenston who could be entrusted with so important a message."

"You must have something to eat before you go farther. Come and speak to Charles for a moment. He has been asking for you. The kettle is on the boil and I'll have some breakfast for you directly." Ann led her sister-in-law along the hall to the room where the sick man lay.

A plate of bread, spread with jam, awaited her when she returned to the kitchen. "I've been using dried leaves from my black currant bush as a substitute for tea these last weeks," Mrs. Stephen said as she filled Laura's cup with the steaming beverage. "Do you not agree that it is quite a palatable brew?"

"Indeed, yes." The tea was hot and fragrant and she drank it thirstily. "I must go now," Laura said when she had drained the cup. "There are two small packets of tea in my basket. Perhaps I can let you have a little more when you've used them. I've hidden almost all of the tea James had in stock in a safe place. If the Yankees were to find it they would make an end of it quickly."

"Thank you, Sister! I'm grateful for the tea. I've been wishing I had some real tea for Charles. He finds the currant drink too bitter." Ann Secord placed a pot of rhubarb jam and some wild strawberries in the sweet-grass basket. "You'll be going by way of Shipman's Corners," she said. "Take these preserves to my friend, Sara Shipman. They will provide you with an excuse if you should meet anyone along the way. Mrs. Shipman is a good woman. You can trust her."

Laura took the basket from Ann's hand. "Pray for me," she said.

"I will, Sister. You know I will. God keep you and give you a safe journey."

Chapter 18

Through the Black Swamp and the Beechwoods

With a hurried word of caution to her sister-in-law, Laura took her departure. She met no one on the road as she left St. David's and experienced little difficulty in finding the narrow trail that twisted its way toward the Black Swamp. Now, at the edge of it, she paused and looked about in dismay. The trail she had followed seemed to end abruptly among the ferns and tall grasses that mingled with wildflowers in lush confusion to blot out any trace of it. The heat had become oppressive suddenly, and she wiped beads of perspiration from her forehead as she searched for the path. Hesitantly, she went forward into the woods, hoping to find some trace of it, and as she walked, broke off twigs from the trees to mark her course. All about her, she could see wildflowers. In spite of her confusion she noticed the bright patches the scarlet of devil's paintbrush made in the grass. Her fingers brushed against rose-coloured laurel blossoms as she passed the shrubs, stepping carefully to avoid crushing one or two late moccasin flowers whose golden shoes drooped in the heat. To the right the ground sloped downward, and in the distance she could see clumps of pink and white ladyslippers like those that grew among the cotton sedge in the marsh behind James's barn. In-

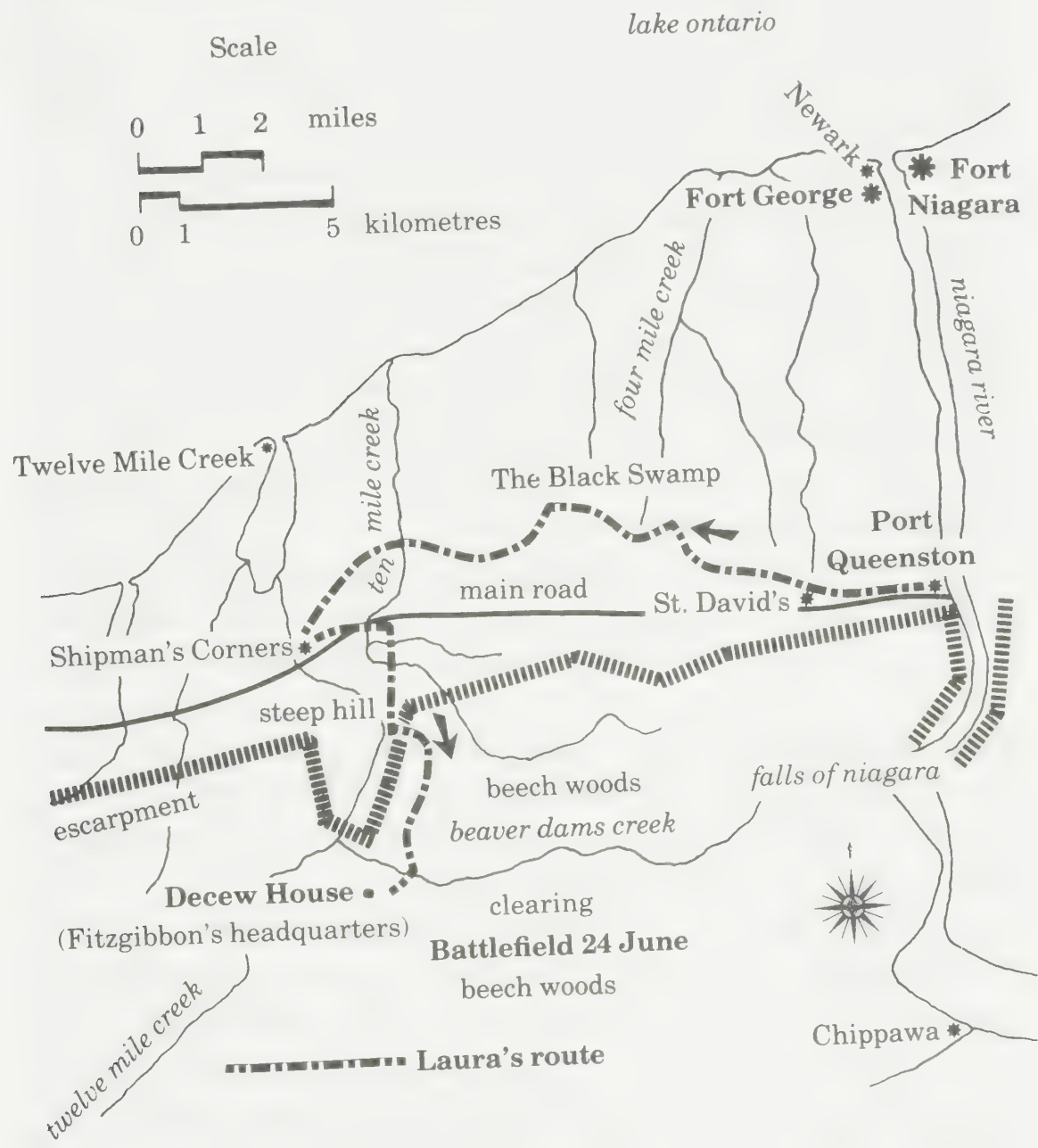
instinctively, she turned and walked toward the flowers, certain that the bog she must skirt lay in that direction; she would come upon the trail before she reached the marsh.

Aware suddenly of a strange rasping noise, she stopped to listen and, scarcely breathing, stood motionless while a long thick rattlesnake glided through the grass, close to her feet; she continued to wait until she saw a second snake slither past, following its mate. Involuntarily she shuddered and before going on broke off a branch from a dead tree to carry in her hand.

The ground had become quite soft and spongy. Her shoes squished in the wet soil and began to sink more and more deeply into it, and her legs ached as she freed them from the sticky, clinging ooze. She remembered that James had cautioned her to keep to the left of the bog and turned to retrace her steps. Almost immediately she sank to her knees in a hole and began to realize that she had stumbled into a quagmire without finding the path. Although she tried not to panic, there was fear in her heart as she grasped at some bushes for support, pulling and struggling until her legs were free. She took three or four more steps to the left and suddenly her legs sank into the ooze again. The bog seemed to suck her feet down and the shrubbery she clutched at snapped in her hand as she struggled to extricate herself. An overhanging bough broke as she pulled against it. Terrified, she reached for and caught a larger, thicker branch and clung to it until she was able to free her legs. Carefully testing the ground ahead, she found it more solid and after she had walked several yards was surprised to find the soil dry beneath her feet. She sat down for a moment in the shelter of some low shrubs, to rub her aching limbs, and was dismayed to discover that one of her shoes was missing.

Off to the right, she could hear a strange, crashing sound on the far side of the marsh. Something, an animal or a human being, was moving about among the trees. Cautiously, she raised her head and peered over the low bushes, straining her eyes to catch a glimpse of the intruder without being observed. The sound of a sud-

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den, angry growl startled her and made her crouch down quickly, as she realized that only the bog separated her from a foraging brown bear. She wondered whether the animal could sense her presence and what she would do if he discovered her; when he lumbered off into the thickness of the forest she breathed a sign of relief. Her body trembled almost uncontrollably as she rose from her hiding place. Her legs felt stiff and tired as she went on her way. She could see that the sun was high in the sky as she left the swamp and knew it must be midday or later.

At Shipman's Corners she stopped at the Shipman farm to sip a cup of water, thirstily. When Mrs. Shipman begged her to rest she shook her head. "Not now," she said. "I've got to get to Beaver Dams as quickly as possible." Ruefully, she proffered the mud-caked basket. "My sister-in-law sent you a pot of jam. I'm afraid I've lost it along the way." She smiled and bade Mrs. Shipman goodbye.

James had told her that she must cross Ten Mile Creek twice on the way to Beaver Dams, and when she came upon a narrow fast-running stream she thought it fitted his description of the narrower branch. She looked with distaste at her muddy stockings, gathered her skirts over one arm, and waded into the water. When she climbed the bank on the farther side her balbriggan hose were clean. The water had washed away all trace of the bog mud, and with it her second shoe.

Although there was less undergrowth in the woods now and she could see faint traces of a path, she found that without her shoes walking was extremely hazardous. Sticks and brambles bruised her feet and tore at the scarlet clocks on her black stockings as she stumbled on. Presently, as James had said she would do, she came to a second stream, and in spite of the discomfort to her feet her spirits rose with the confirmed assurance that she had not lost her way. With no means of ascertaining the number of miles she had walked or how far she was from Beaver Dams, she could not be sure that she would reach Lieutenant Fitzgibbon before the Yankees arrived. The sun was lower in the sky, although the air was still stifling hot.

The second creek was broader than the first, swollen to the top of its banks. Unable to find more than the broken moorings of the footbridge James had described to her, she walked downstream until she found an uprooted tree that spanned the creek from bank to bank. She could see that water flowed over it at one point and she gathered up her long skirts hesitantly, fastened them round her waist, and crawled out onto the gnarled trunk. With one hand placed ahead of the other she tested the strength of the makeshift bridge before pulling her left knee past the right one. Again, her hand tested the strength of the tree. Again, she pulled one knee forward cautiously. When she reached the far bank she lingered a moment to dabble her aching feet in the cool water before she shook her skirts about her ankles and went on.

Gradually the ground sloped higher. The enveloping arms of the beech trees reached out to touch each other and squirrels leapt from branch to branch. Her solemn face broke into a smile as she listened to their noisy chatter. "Surely I must be close to the beaver dam now," she said aloud when she realized that she was in the beech-woods.

Ahead of her the terrain broke sharply into a steep ridge, and the footing became more uneven as she climbed. She fumbled in her pocket for a handkerchief, and unable to find it, wiped the perspiration from her face with the sleeve of her dress. She was hot, tired and thirsty and her breathing was laboured as she endeavoured to walk at a faster pace.

She stepped on a sharp rock as she climbed the steep bank and gashed her foot, and when she paused to examine it found her hands stained with blood. Fearful that the dye might infect the wound she hurried to remove the torn black stocking, raised her skirt, and ripped off a large piece of the white ruffle that trimmed her inner petticoat. When she had cleansed the foot as well as she could she wrapped it with thick layers of the cloth, tearing an end of the bandage into strips to tie it securely. The remainder of the ruffle made a bandage for the other foot. Grasping at roots and saplings for support as she climbed, she went on. Although small of frame and

slight, the weight of her body loosened the insecure roots and bent the saplings, causing her to slip backward, almost lose her footing. She reached the top of the ridge, breathless, dishevelled, the bandages on her feet blood-soaked and torn. Around her the beechwoods seemed to stretch endlessly in all directions. She could see no evidence of a trail, and while she stood there, wondering in which direction to proceed, a dozen shrieking Indians rushed from the shelter of the trees to surround her. She froze in terror as a gaunt brown face was thrust close to hers. Her arm was grasped roughly and she was propelled forward until she stumbled and fell, releasing the man's grip on her arm.

He made no further move to touch her. Instead, he pointed to her feet, uttered commiserating sounds in his own language.

Quick to notice the sudden tone of sympathy in his voice, she said slowly, her eyes searching his as she willed herself to remain calm, "Beaver Dams! Fitzgibbon! I want to go to Lieutenant Fitzgibbon."

She told herself she must put on a bold front, that it was important not to panic or show fear, and watched the changing expressions on the man's face. Again, she said, in clear firm tones, "I want to get to Beaver Dams. Please tell your Chief I must speak to Lieutenant Fitzgibbon. Chief," she repeated, "take me to your Chief."

The man nodded, grasped her arm once more, pulled her to a standing position, and pushed her forward while the others fell in behind them. Near the edge of a clearing they came upon a larger group of Indians, all of whom carried muskets. She shuddered as she observed the grim faces and wondered whether they were friends or enemies. When her captor espied the Chief he hurried Laura toward him, and the two spoke rapidly in the Indian tongue. After a moment the Chief turned to her and pointed to the grass. "Sit," he said. "Is the white woman tired from long walk? Feet bleed from cut on sharp rock?" He spoke the questioning words in hesitant English.

She nodded.

"Not good for white women to walk alone in woods.

Much danger. What does the white woman want?"

"I must get to Beaver Dams quickly. How far is it from here?"

"Beaver Dams that way," he said, pointing to the right.

Driven by her desperation, Laura spoke boldly. "I must see Lieutenant Fitzgibbon. Please take me to him. It is most urgent."

She watched, anxiously, as the Chief's eyes scanned her face.

"White woman friend of Fitzgibbon?" he asked.

Laura nodded. "I have a message for him, a very important message."

The Chief continued to stare at her for a moment in silence. "Wait here," he said then. "My brave take white woman to Beaver Dams."

Chapter 19

Meeting with Lieutenant Fitzgibbon

The man who had conducted Laura to the Chief was assigned to guide her to Beaver Dams. Gently, almost hesitantly now, he grasped her arm and led her back through the beechwoods at a rapid pace until she stumbled and would have fallen had he not supported her. The injured foot was painfully sore in its sodden, blood-stained bandage. Her legs ached. Her arms were rigid with fatigue and she felt dizzy, faint. "Dear God, give me strength to finish the journey," she prayed.

Abruptly they came to the end of the woods and paused at the edge of a beaver meadow on the far side of which she could see the large stone house James had described to her so exactly – the Decew house where Lieutenant Fitzgibbon had set up his headquarters. There, the Indian guide released his grasp of her arm, pointed to the stone house, muttered the word, "Fitzgibbon" turned, and disappeared into the forest.

Left to cross the clearing alone, she began to walk toward her goal with halting steps. Although the sun seemed to rest on the horizon now, she could find no relief from the exhausting heat. She reached her hand up to remove the bonnet from her head, and realized suddenly that she must have lost it along the way. Her hair, loosened from its tidy knot, fell about her shoulders. Her throat was parched from thirst and, as she began to be

aware that she had almost reached the end of her journey, tears of relief mingled with the perspiration on her cheeks. Impatiently, she wiped the moisture away with the sleeve of her dress.

A half dozen soldiers, grouped together near the stone door, drew her attention, presently, and as she hobbled toward them she saw one man leave the others. Dangling against his gray trousers, the steel of his sword gleamed in the last rays of the sun as he hurried toward her.

When he reached her side he paused, eyeing her sharply. "Who are you? Where have you come from?" he demanded. "This is scarcely a place for a woman to be wandering about alone."

"I've a message for Lieutenant Fitzgibbon. I've walked all the way from Queenston. Please take me to him. Unless he receives my information immediately it may be too late."

"A message you say! Come with me." He led her to the stone house, and with a nod to the sentry who stood at the entrance to the vine-covered porch, opened the door and preceded her inside.

Near a window in the front room, Laura saw a man in a British officer's scarlet coat, studying some papers that lay on the table before him. He sat erect in his chair, with his long legs sprawled awkwardly beneath the improvised desk. He seemed younger than James, she thought and, in spite of her weariness, observed his high cheek bones, the shock of red hair, the thin, gaunt frame. When she glanced toward her companion and whispered "Lieutenant Fitzgibbon?" he nodded.

The man at the table looked up, an expression of annoyance on his face; but as his eyes searched hers, as he took in the details of her person, the bandaged feet, and the torn clothing, his irritation changed to curiosity. He rose from his chair and advanced to meet them. "Eh! What have we here, Lieutenant Jarvis?" he asked.

"I'm not certain, sir. This lady says she has come from Queenston with an important message for you. I noticed her limping across the meadow just now and went to meet her. I think she must have come through the

beechwoods.”

“From Queenston! That’s impossible! Queenston is in the hands of the Yankees.”

Abruptly, he turned to Laura. “Who are you, Ma’am?” he demanded, his piercing eyes fixed on hers.

“I’m Mrs. James Secord. I think you may know of my husband. He was an officer in the Lincoln militia. He served under General Brock at Queenston Heights last October and was seriously wounded during the battle that was fought after the General was killed.”

“Indeed! James Secord’s wife! I’m sorry to say I’ve not had the pleasure of meeting your husband, Ma’am, but I’m told there is no more ardent Loyalist in the whole of the Niagara peninsula than he. How is his wound healing?”

“Not well, I’m afraid. That is why I am here. He is confined to his room and there is no one at Queenston who could have been entrusted with the message.”

“I don’t understand. What is this important news you’ve brought? Sit down here, Ma’am, and tell me about it.” He indicated a windsor chair near the table.

“The Yankees intend to attack Ten Mile Creek and Beaver Dams. Oh, I hope I’m not too late. I was so afraid they would arrive before I could reach you. I came as quickly as I could, but. . .”

Lieutenant Fitzgibbon interrupted her, almost rudely. “How authentic is this information? Are you certain of your facts?”

“Indeed, yes. Some of the Yankee officers are billeted in our house at Queenston. I overheard them discussing their plans while I served their supper, yesterday. They are short of supplies, I understand, and are hoping to capture the food and ammunition they believe you have stored somewhere near Beaver Dams.”

“Of course, the supplies! Tell me everything, Ma’am, quickly, every detail, word for word.”

He interrupted her to ask one or two questions while she outlined the enemy plan; and when she had finished, he smiled — grimly, she thought — and said, “So the Yankees expect to surprise us! Well, we shall see if we can prepare an equal surprise for them.”

In quick, terse words he gave orders to a soldier who stood near the door; then turned and spoke to the officer who had met her in the clearing.

"Mr. Jarvis, please be good enough to take Mrs. Secord to the Turney house. She will be able to rest there. She looks done in. Ask Mrs. Turney to attend to her foot. It should be cleansed and freshly bandaged as soon as possible. I'm off to the Indian camp. The Mohawks from Brant's Ford have already joined their Caughnawaga brothers in the beechwoods, armed with muskets and tomahawks, and spoiling for a fight. Join me at their camp as soon as you've seen to Mrs. Secord."

To Laura he said, simply, "Thank you, Ma'am. The Turneys will look after you until we've attended to this business with the Yankees." He stood for an instant, looking at her curiously, and her heart warmed to the twinkle in his blue eyes, the Irish burr in his voice as he remarked, "You know you're a very remarkable little lady, Mrs. Secord, a very brave woman and a clever one. I don't know how you succeeded in eluding the Yankees on the road from Queenston, but I'd like to hear about it before I send you home to your husband."

Abruptly, he turned on his heel and strode from the room.

"I'll take you to the Turneys now, Ma'am. Then I'll be off to join the Lieutenant," the officer said.

"Could I have a drink of water, please? I'm so very thirsty." Laura's voice trembled.

He poured water into a cup from the jug that stood on a side table, watched her gulp it, and refilled the cup when she asked for more.

"You will have other things to do, Lieutenant," she said, thanking him. "I'm certain I can find my way to Mr. Turney's house." She rose from her chair and handed him the empty cup. A faint cry of pain escaped her when she attempted to walk.

"My orders are to take you there myself, Ma'am. Come, lean on my shoulder. Your foot must be very sore. Try to save it as much as you can."

Gratefully, she placed her hand on his arm and began to limp toward the door. When they reached the

porch her leg suddenly seemed to collapse beneath her weight and she grasped her companion's arm with both hands to save herself from falling. Tears of pain and frustration spilled from her eyes as she looked up at him. "I'm afraid I can't go any farther," she said ruefully.

"Then if you'll permit me, Ma'am, I'll carry you." He gathered her up into his arms and exclaimed in surprise, "Why you're just a little bit of a thing, aren't you?"

When he strode across the porch into the clearing, the western sky was streaked with colour. In spite of the pain in her foot a sense of well-being seemed to envelop her as she was transported through the meadow to the foot of the hill, her arms clasped about Lieutenant Jarvis's neck – a feeling of relief from the responsibility she had carried. Her mission was completed. There was nothing more she could do except hope and pray that Lieutenant Fitzgibbon would have time to foil the Yankees' plan.

Her eyes were half-closed when they reached the Turney house, and she was only vaguely aware of the Lieutenant's conversation with Mrs. Turney, the welcome coolness of the room to which he carried her, the heavenly softness of the bed on which she stretched her aching body. She made one feeble attempt to thank him but her tongue seemed unable to form the words, and after a deep sigh her eyes closed in sleep.

Waking intermittently, only to fall again into a deep sleep, she was finally roused by the sound of field guns. She lay there, gazing about the strange room, unsure of her whereabouts, until the persistent crackle of musket fire recalled to her mind the events of the past hours. Sudden realization that the sounds she heard must mean that the Yankees had arrived caused her to sit up quickly, wondering how long she had been asleep, what time of day it was, and whether Lieutenant Fitzgibbon had been able to prepare for the enemy attack.

Endeavouring to rise, she eased her legs over the side of the bed, cautiously touched the floor with her injured foot, and winced with the sharpness of the pain in it. When she tried to stand erect her legs seemed to buckle beneath her. She was attacked by a sudden dizzi-

ness and fell back against the pillow, breathing heavily, very aware of the boom of the guns, the steady barking of muskets. She noticed that the bloodstains had been washed from her feet. A neat, new bandage replaced the sodden strip of petticoat frill that had wrapped the injured one. Her hands were clean and her face felt refreshed. Someone had cared for her while she slept!

Presently the door was opened and Mrs. Turney entered, carrying a bowl of steaming broth. "You must be in need of food, Mrs. Secord. You've been asleep for more than forty hours; didn't stir while I bathed your foot and sponged your face. I was afraid you might be ill, but my husband said you were likely just exhausted from your long walk. Drink this, and I'll fetch you some tea," she said.

"I can hear musket fire. What does it mean, Mrs. Turney?" Laura sipped the broth between questions.

Mrs. Turney sat down on a ladder-back chair near the bed and tucked a strand of graying hair beneath her muslin cap. "I'm not sure what is happening," she replied slowly. "The Yankees didn't come yesterday. But the field guns have been firing for almost three hours today. They must be Yankee guns. I'm certain we have no field pieces at Beaver Dams. The sound seemed so much closer an hour ago that I'm inclined to think our men must have driven the Yankees back a little way, at least."

"The muskets are being fired incessantly. Do you think they are ours, Mrs. Turney?"

"That will be the Mohawk and Caughnawaga Indians, I'm sure. The Caughnawagas have been camped in the beechwoods for two or three days. Luckily for us they are fighting on our side. I've been hearing the sound of their musket fire all day."

"Do you know where Lieutenant Fitzgibbon is?"

"I can't say, Ma'am. He gave my husband orders about the stocks of food and ammunition before he went off with the Mohawk and Caughnawaga chiefs."

"Are the supplies safe?"

"Yes, indeed. Everything has been moved. The Yankees could never find the hiding place."

"I wish we could know what is happening." Laura

sighed deeply as she spoke.

"Now you rest easy, Mrs. Secord. I'm sure everything is going to be all right. I've got great faith in Lieutenant Fitzgibbon."

"I shouldn't like the Yankees to find me here, Mrs. Turney. It would go hard with my husband and children if the Yankee Colonel were to learn that I had warned the Lieutenant about the attack." She brushed a hand across her forehead, as she thought of the Colonel's threat to send James across the border unless she promised to cooperate with the enemy.

"Don't you worry. We'll look after you. If need be, we'll hide you as safely as the supplies are hidden, until the Yankees have gone. You're a very brave woman, Mrs. Secord. I'm proud to have you in my house."

"Oh, no," Laura protested. "I'm not brave at all, really. Someone had to warn Lieutenant Fitzgibbon, and there was no man or woman at Queenston who could be trusted with the message. You've no idea how frightened I was every step of the way, and how I worried that I might be too late."

"Frightened or not, I say you're brave to leave your family and walk all that lonely way to Beaver Dams." Mrs. Turney removed the empty soup bowl from Laura's hand. "I'll fetch you some currant tea, now," she said.

Involuntarily, Laura shivered. "You would never believe I could be such a coward. When the Indians confronted me, shouting and waving their muskets, I thought my time had come. I had no means of knowing that they were our friends. I thought I might be killed at any instant. Never, as long as I live, shall I forget that moment!"

"Mr. Turney says the Caughnawaga Chief told Lieutenant Fitzgibbon that you were a very brave woman."

Laura smiled faintly. "Listen," she exclaimed, "can you hear the muskets? Everything seems so quiet now."

Mrs. Turney opened the window and stood there, looking out. "The field guns are silent too," she said.

"What does it mean? Laura asked, in a whisper. "Do you suppose. . .?"

"We shall soon know," Mrs. Turney replied. "There

is someone coming across the meadow. I think, yes, I'm sure it is my husband."

Chapter 20

Victory at Beaver Dams

"The Mohawk and Caughnawaga Indians saved the day for us," Lieutenant Jarvis remarked as he escorted Laura to Queenston the following day. "They were magnificent. Hidden among the trees, they watched the Yankees advance along the road, then allowed them to march through the open fields until they were within yards of the ravine before a single musket was fired. Colonel Boerstler's men were a perfect target, spread as they were through the meadow, and when they began to retreat the Indians pursued them from the cover of the beechwoods, firing incessantly and with deadly accuracy. Although there were no more than a couple of hundred Indians all told, the enemy must have believed they numbered twice that many. Lieutenant Fitzgibbon and I had fifty men waiting to close in from the rear, but thanks to the Lieutenant's ingenuity and the enthusiasm of the Indians, not a shot was fired by one of our men. Before the Yankee Colonel quite realized that he had been enticed into an ambush and trapped between the Indians and our soldiers, many of his men had been killed or wounded."

"It must have been a crushing defeat for the Yankees," Laura agreed. "They were so certain of victory. They had so many men and guns, ten to every one of ours. I overheard them boasting that Lieutenant Fitzgib-

bon couldn't hope to resist the overpowering attack they planned."

"It was four o'clock when the order to surrender was given and Lieutenant Fitzgibbon signalled to the Indians to cease firing. If the fighting hadn't ceased I believe the entire Yankee detachment would have been wiped out. Colonel Boerstler seemed to be in a state of shock when he laid down his arms. It seemed as if he could not accept the evidence of his eyes and ears."

I wonder if the women who fled to their relatives will come back to Queenston now, and whether it will be safe for the children to run about as they did a week ago."

"Indeed, yes. Queenston is in British hands again, thanks in part to you, Ma'am." Lieutenant Jarvis spoke emphatically.

Startled, Laura protested, "Oh, no! Please don't say that. I wouldn't want it to be known that I informed Lieutenant Fitzgibbon of the enemy plan. If the Yankees should come back to Queenston again they might take my husband away as a prisoner."

"Very well, Ma'am. Your wishes will be respected. In my opinion you have great courage, great courage indeed. If you hadn't reached Beaver Dams when you did, if you had come a few hours later, the outcome of the battle might have been vastly different. The Mohawks brought the Lieutenant some word about the Yankees when they arrived, but the information you gave him was much more specific, and told their exact plan. The people of Upper Canada owe you a deep debt of gratitude."

"It was no more than my duty. I had no other choice. We couldn't sit quietly by, and do nothing when the Yankees talked of taking possession of the whole of Upper Canada. I would have walked twice as far, in the face of much greater danger, if it had been necessary."

There was no one in the street when they reached Queenston. The village seemed as deserted of inhabitants as it had been when the Yankees were in possession of it.

When they approached the Secord house Laura saw

Bob emerge from the barn with a basket of eggs in his hand; she watched him drop the basket and run to the kitchen for shelter.

"Our servant was beaten very badly by a Yankee officer and is terrified now of anyone in a soldier's uniform," Laura apologized to Lieutenant Jarvis. "If you could tether our horses to a tree Bob will attend to them when I've persuaded him that you are a friend."

The children ran to meet them as they dismounted. "Mama, Mama, the Yankee soldiers have gone," they cried, in a chorus.

"Do you think they will come back, Mama?" Mary asked.

"I hope not, darling."

When she had hugged and kissed each one she turned again to Mary. "Where is Appy? Is she better?"

"No, Mama, I think she is really sick. She doesn't sleep for more than a few minutes at a time, and we can't get her to eat her food. She keeps crying, 'Mama, I want my Mama.'"

"Where is she?" Laura asked quickly.

"With Papa, in the library. He is very upset because he hasn't been able to soothe her. He will be so glad you've come home."

Laura turned to Lieutenant Jarvis. "Please forgive my preoccupation with the children. You must come in and talk with my husband. I'm sure he will be anxious to hear what happened at Beaver Dams."

"Thank God, you're safe," James exclaimed when she opened the door into the library.

He lay on the sofa with Appy in his arms, his leg extended before him on a pillow, and when she bent to kiss him he pulled her down close and held her tightly until she broke away, saying, "Darling I've brought you a visitor. Lieutenant Jarvis was kind enough to accompany me home."

James reached out to shake the Lieutenant's hand and said, "Tell me what has happened. We've had no news. I hoped it meant victory for us when the Yankees failed to return last evening but I couldn't be certain. There was that plan, if you remember, Laura, to push on

to Burlington.”

“Colonel Boerstler’s men marched into a trap at Beaver Dams. Unfortunately a good many of them were killed. The Yankees won’t be coming back to Queenston just now, James. Lieutenant Jarvis was with Lieutenant Fitzgibbon yesterday. He can tell you what took place at Beaver Dams.”

She lifted Appy from her husband’s arms, murmuring “There, there, baby, Mama’s here now,” and left the room. By the time she reached the kitchen the sobbing had ceased. The little girl was almost asleep. Her discarded cradle stood near the door and Laura placed her in it; then sat down and began to rock her gently. Bob had gone to unfasten the horses and stable them. Fan was busy with preparations for dinner. The children had returned to their play in the garden.

Laura brushed a wisp of hair back from her forehead, enjoying the pleasant atmosphere of the quiet kitchen, savouring the good smell of Fan’s cooking. She examined her petticoat and dress, the torn brown skirt which Mrs. Turney had done her best to launder and mend, and decided they would no longer serve as her second-best costume. When she looked down at her feet, encased in a pair of Mrs. Turney’s stockings, the injured one neatly bandaged, she remembered the slippers she had hidden at the back of the kitchen stove as she was about to start out on her journey and went to retrieve them. In the intervening hours so much had happened: the journey through the Black Swamp, her encounter with the Indians, the amazing battle of Beaver Dams, the total rout of the Yankees. Would there be peace now, she wondered, or was this just a lull before the next attack? She hoped with all her heart that there need be no more war, with its useless loss of life; that the men could soon put away their firearms, follow their normal occupations, till the soil, and develop their country.

Her reverie was interrupted by Fan. “Please Missus, will the Yankee officers be coming back? Should I cook food for them?”

Laura thrust her feet into the well-worn house slippers, got up, and moved toward the door. “No, Fan,” she

said. "You need not prepare extra food. The Yankees have gone and I hope they won't return. We do have a guest, though. Will you please set another place at the table and watch Appy for a few moments while I change my dress. This one is scarcely appropriate for dinner."

Chapter 21

A Visit from Mrs. Shipman

Within a week or two of the Battle of Beaver Dams the women, children, and old men returned to Queenston, and in a bewildered, disorganized sort of way began to set their homes in order and assume those extra tasks left undone by absent menfolk. In a desperate search for food the Yankees had broken windowpanes, forced the doors of empty dwellings, and left shattered glass, splintered wood, and other debris behind them. Cows and pigs, turned out of their pens to fend for themselves when the houses were abandoned, wandered away or were driven off by the enemy to augment dwindling meat supplies. Chickens, geese, and turkeys had taken to the woods to build nests and lay their eggs, and were often not discovered until weeks later when, with a brood of young trailing behind them, they ventured into the open fields in search of food. Although husbands who served with the militia returned for a day, or a week, when they could be spared, to give what assistance they might in harvesting their own crops and those of imprisoned neighbours, the stories they told of the war did little to bolster the faltering courage of their womenfolk.

James Secord, fretting because of forced inactivity and still plagued by intermittent fever, worried constantly about the outcome of the struggle. "I tell you, Laura, the Yankees would not have dared invade our

borders if the British were not so involved with Napoleon in Europe.” There was anger and frustration in his voice as he went on. “Until England is able to send us more troops, or the militia becomes strong enough to counter-attack successfully, we shall live with a constant threat of war hanging over our heads. The burning, looting, and wanton destruction of property will go on and on. So many of our men are being wounded. So many lives have already been lost. Believe me, it is not a pleasant prospect for a helpless man to contemplate. If I were able to rejoin my regiment, or do anything useful, I think I should not mind so much. To sit or lie here, day after day, or at best walk a few steps about the house, unable to make even a small contribution to help win the war, is a devilishly bitter experience. You couldn’t know how demoralizing it is, Lolly.”

Quick to note the desperation in his voice, Laura laid aside the vest she was knitting, sat down on the edge of the bed, and brushed a cool hand over his brow. “Don’t fret so, darling. Your fever will never subside if you continue to upset yourself. There is something you can do, if you will, James.”

“What is it, Lolly? What could a helpless, crippled man possibly do? Tell me!” His tone was bitter.

“I’ve been thinking that it is a year now since the war began, and if it should drag on indefinitely we shall have to plan to produce larger quantities of food, plant more wheat and corn, conserve every scrap of clothing material, and share what we have with others. The women are willing to do what they can, but we need some direction. Every woman tends to look to her husband for guidance in domestic matters, and more than one is finding it difficult to assume his responsibilities and make all the decisions while he is absent. In addition, she lives constantly with the fear that her man may be killed, or maimed, or imprisoned – a fear that is bound to cloud her mind so that it is impossible for her to think calmly and clearly. It seems to me that you, who are a victim of the war yourself, could give them some measure of courage and confidence if you could offer them practical advice.”

“If I were able to get about among the villagers, visit the farmers’ wives, perhaps I could help them, but you know that is impossible.”

“It wouldn’t be necessary to see each one in person. Messages could be relayed. I’m sure the details could be resolved if you would agree to advise them. There are so many problems about which a woman needs a man’s counsel, small, worrying decisions she must make about whether or not to replace the cow confiscated by the Yankees, or purchase an extra pig; how she is to obtain a supply of salt now that it can’t be imported from the State of New York. A man is familiar with such matters.”

Persuaded to assume the role of adviser, James instructed Bob to warn the village folk that the winter could bring shortages of food and clothing, and that every effort must be made to conserve available supplies. He urged those who approached him with questions to remind their friends to live as frugally as possible. The people of Queenston, he said, could not allow themselves to be lulled into a belief that, because the British had won an easy victory at Beaver Dams and before that had beaten the enemy at Stoney Creek, the Yankees would not return again to the Niagara peninsula.

In the absence of the Cartwrights who, because of the war, were unable to make their usual summer journey to Queenston, James sent Bob to harvest the dandelions that grew in profusion about the grounds of his brother-in-law’s estate. The older girls, Mary, Charlotte, and Harriet, were detailed to perform a similar task in the meadow beyond the Secord barn. Dried and crumbled, the roots could be brewed to make a reasonable cup of coffee, he said, and recalled the days of the War of Independence when his mother, along with other Loyalist women, had been forced to boil the roots of dandelions as a substitute beverage.

Laura worked long hours out of doors in order to release Bob for more arduous tasks, tended her vegetable garden, and gathered wild berries to be preserved with maple sugar. When the black currant bushes near the gate had been stripped of their fruit she plucked the

leaves and dried them to use instead of the imported tea they could no longer obtain.

James's shop had been closed when his assistant joined the militia. His dwindling stock of merchandise was removed to the house, where fourteen-year-old Mary became the storekeeper.

On mornings, when his leg felt comfortable, he sometimes hobbled to the garden on crutches improvised by Bob, to sit in the shade of the trees. There he read to the younger members of the family from Laura's much-thumbed copy of Oliver Goldsmith's *Little Goody Two Shoes* or Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and set a lesson in arithmetic for the older ones. Agreed that in spite of the war the children must continue their education, he and Laura pledged themselves to provide daily periods of instruction for them after classes in the village schoolroom had been suspended in order that the schoolmaster might go to war.

Laura had just settled her husband in the old ladder-back rocking chair, beneath spreading branches of a red mulberry tree one morning, his crutches within easy reach, and a signal bell on the rustic table beside him, when her attention was attracted by the sound of a horse's hooves. She looked up to see a woman riding along the path from the open gate. Tall, large-boned, erect, her skirts tucked about her waist, legs encased in a pair of men's trousers, she sat astride a white horse. Upon reaching the group under the trees she swung herself to the ground effortlessly, shook down her skirts, pushed a brown bonnet back from her sun-leathered face, and smiled. In her hand she carried a sweetgrass basket.

"Why, 'tis Mrs. Shipman!" Laura exclaimed and hurried to welcome the visitor.

"I've come to return the pretty basket you left with me, Mrs. Secord, and bring you a few huckleberries for a pudding," Mrs. Shipman said. "To tell the truth I wanted to satisfy myself that you were none the worse for your journey to Beaver Dams. When I heard that the Yankees

had surrendered I concluded you must have reached Lieutenant Fitzgibbon without harm."

Laura smiled. "It seemed an endlessly long way but, as you say, I reached Beaver Dams safely." She took the basket from Mrs. Shipman. "It was good of you to come," she said. "You must be weary if you've ridden all the way from Shipman's Corners this morning. Do sit down here beside my husband and let me bring you some refreshment."

"Thank you. I should like that. Do you know, I've been wanting to call on you ever since my niece, Mary Dexter, first talked of you well nigh ten years ago. I promised myself at that time I'd make your acquaintance when I went to stay with her. Somehow, I've let the years go by without ever paying her a visit. When you stopped at my door on your way to Beaver Dams I was too surprised to ask if you were the Mrs. Secord who had been such a good friend to Mary, although after you had gone I reckoned you must be. Yesterday, when Mr. Shipman came home to get fresh socks and his other pair of boots before marching to Fort George, he suggested that I make the journey to Queenston now, while the Yankees are occupied elsewhere and it is safe to ride along the road without fear of an encounter with them. I was fortunate enough to get a neighbour's boy to tend the livestock for a few days so I started out early this morning."

While Laura went to fetch fresh baked scones and coffee in the pink lustre pot, James, eager for news, plied Mrs. Shipman with questions; he learned that British troops and a company of militia were about to attack Fort George in an attempt to regain the post they had lost to the Yankees some weeks earlier.

"Fan has substituted blueberries for currants in the scones," Laura remarked, offering one to the visitor. "Our supply of Levant currants was exhausted some time ago and we no longer have any real coffee."

"Your coffee is delicious, I assure you, although any beverage served from that beautiful lustre pot would be enjoyable. I wonder if you know how my heart is warmed just by looking at it." Mrs. Shipman reached out to touch the coffee pot with caressing fingers.

"It belonged to my mother. I treasure it very much," Laura said.

Mrs. Shipman nodded. "My mother had a set of lustreware too, and when we came to Upper Canada I carried it with me. I think I prized it more than any of our few possessions. Unfortunately, although the pieces were wrapped carefully, the coffee pot and milk jug had broken before we arrived at Fort Niagara. It was during the War of Independence. We rode all the way from New Jersey on horseback, camped in the woods at night, and when our supply of food dwindled we made do with what we could find along the trail, wild berries, fish from the streams, a pheasant or rabbit when Shipman was able to shoot one. The children were ill and one of them, the youngest, died on the way. That was a bad time, Mrs. Secord, a very bad time. We were so glad to reach Fort Niagara that I scarcely noticed the dishes were broken."

Laura refilled her visitor's cup. "I'm so sorry," she said.

"I'd like to give you my lustre sugar basin," Mrs. Shipman went on. "It is the only piece I have now. It would match your set perfectly and you could use it as a bowl for slops from the cups."

"Oh, no," Laura protested. "You mustn't give me your last piece."

"I'd be happy to let you have it as a means of saying how very proud I am to know you. You did a fine, brave deed, my dear, by going to Beaver Dams to tell Lieutenant Fitzgibbon about the Yankee plans. Mr. Shipman says the victory there, following so closely after the one at Stoney Creek has put new life into the militia, new heart in the people throughout the Niagara peninsula."

"Please, Mrs. Shipman, I wish you wouldn't talk about it." Laura's voice was tense, her words abrupt. "My contribution was a very small one. You, or any other woman, would have done as much. I hope the story won't get about. I'm so afraid it might go hard with us, particularly with James, if the Yankees should come back to Queenston again and learn that it was I who gave Lieutenant Fitzgibbon the information about their plans."

Mrs. Shipman nodded in agreement. "There is logic

in what you say. You will accept my lustre sugar bowl”

“Gladly, thank you. I shall cherish it as carefully as the pieces I now have. You are very kind.”

“That is settled then. I’ll send it to you as soon as I can do so safely. Now I must be off. I’m anxious to see my niece. Poor dear, I do wish her baby could have lived. The last time she stayed with me I thought she was a pathetically lonely person. Robert has been absent so much of the time since their marriage, and now that he is a militia officer it must be even worse for her.”

“I think you will find that Mary is much happier than she was, Mrs. Shipman. The war seems to have claimed her attention. She has little time to think of her own problems. She worries about Robert, of course, just as every other woman whose husband is away at war does, but she is too busy to feel lonely. The village women gather in her home whenever they have an hour to spare in order to sew or knit for the men in the militia. We’ve been saving every scrap of cotton material, our frayed petticoats and sheets to make bandages for the soldiers who’ve been wounded. All the available pieces of leather, bearhide or deerskin, are made into breeches and moccasins to be distributed among the most needy soldiers.”

“I’m glad to hear it, my dear, not just because Mary is happier, but for the reason that the need is so great. From what my Shipman says I’m led to believe that some of our men are beginning to look more like scarecrows than human beings, with their clothing in tatters and boots worn to shreds.”

Chapter 22

Domestic Crisis

The scene of battle shifted west and east as summer gave place to autumn. In the Niagara peninsula wounded soldiers returned to their homes to be nursed back to health. Here and there, window shades remained drawn in lonely houses where women mourned quietly for husbands or sons who would not return, accepting their loss with a fortitude born of the stern times. Farm wives worked early and late to harvest ripened crops, flailed wheat with short, heavy sticks in order to separate the grain from the chaff. Often, two or three women shared the same cart to transport their wheat to the nearest grist mill, and more than one wife suffered bruised muscles, or an aching back, caused by the weight of flour sacks they were forced to lift. Yet no complaint was heard. Feelings of personal discomfort were looked upon as a weakness to be ignored by any woman whose man was fighting for the survival of his country.

In October Dr. Spencely returned to Queenston, briefly, to tend the sick and wounded. There was an expression of grave disquietude in his eyes as he examined James's badly ulcered leg, muttered the words 'diseased tissue,' and cited the possibility that the leg might have to be removed if the infection continued to spread.

"No, no, not amputation! I would sooner die than let you cut off my leg," James shouted in protest.

Laura's face was gray with concern as she followed the doctor along the hall to the sitting room, and her voice trembled as she queried the likelihood that such drastic treatment would be necessary. "Can nothing be done, Doctor? Is there no other way to stop the spread of infection? You saw the distress in his face, heard the despair in his voice. Please tell me how to help him."

"I have a jar of ointment with me which I would like you to use. I can't say whether or not it will be effective for James, but there is nothing more that can be done at present. Apply the salve to the area around the wound each day. Unfortunately, his leg has not been completely free of infection since I removed the bullet from it, almost a year ago, and if the festering sores should continue to spread extensively . . . !" He gestured with his hands, leaving the sentence unfinished.

"What kind of remedy is it, Doctor? I've heard that the Indians blend certain herbs into an emollient which, if applied to cuts and raw sores, is said to have special healing qualities. If I could obtain some of the preparation I should like to try it. Surely it could do no harm!"

Dr. Spencely set his worn satchel down on a table near the window, searched within its bulging depths for a small jar, removed the top, and sniffed the contents before offering it to Laura.

"This salve contains healing agents similar to those used by many of the Indians. Originally, it was a recipe which was given to me by the wife of a chief while the Mohawks were living at Fort Niagara during the War of Independence. I was a young man then, just beginning to practise my profession, and I was grateful to the woman. When I blended the ingredients I added a soothing, jelly-like substance to relieve the irritation I thought certain of the herbs might cause to a tender skin. Try it, my dear. I can't promise that it will perform a miracle, but if it should be effective, and you are in need of a fresh supply, send a message to me at Burlington. I expect to be stationed there for the winter."

Laura examined the jar, felt the oily texture of its contents with an experimenting finger, and sniffed the pungent odour. "Dr. Spencely," she said in a voice tight

with emotion, "if this salve does not check the infection, if the sores continue to spread, what shall I do? I must know now."

He placed a fatherly hand on her shoulder. "Don't despair yet, my dear. The ointment should arrest the spread of the infection for a time, at least. If not, and the ulcerated area continues to enlarge, you must try to get word to me as quickly as you can. In any event, I shall come back to Queenston again next month, unless the Yankees return. Look after him well in the meantime. We shall decide then what must be done."

From the beginning of their marriage Laura and James had discussed their personal problems and anxieties together, freely. Now, for the first time, Laura found it impossible to mention the subject that was uppermost in both their minds. Whenever she dressed his wound the possibility of amputation absorbed her thoughts, and yet she could not bring herself to talk about it. James's reaction to Dr. Spencely's suggestion had been so violent, so desperate! Certain that fear of losing his limb was never absent from his mind, she was afraid to let him know that she, too, was apprehensive. Instead she endeavoured to be gay and cheerful in his presence, and the falseness of her gaiety angered him so that he lashed out at her about trivial incidents. When he saw the hurt in her eyes his anger increased and was often followed by a wave of shame that made him turn his face away. To Laura it seemed that a barrier was being raised between them, a wall of misunderstanding which neither one was able to surmount. James became morose, irritable, and despondent, and when they were together she was often at a loss for words to cheer him.

That hour at the end of the day to which she had formerly looked forward as a time of relaxation and pleasant conversation, a time for making plans or resolving differences, had of late become a period of strained silence that was almost unendurable. James no longer sat on the edge of the fourposter bed to watch her remove the pins from her hair, nor did he take the brush from her hand and with deft strokes twine the long strands around his fingers, or place a kiss at the nape of her neck

as he had often done. Night after night, when she had finished dressing his wound and fluffed his pillow to make him more comfortable, he turned his face to the wall. He lay with closed eyes, feigning sleep, instead of waiting to gather her into his arms after she had blown out the candle and crept in beside him. Deeply hurt, unable to understand the reason for his unusual behaviour, she lay awake in the darkness, her body rigidly tense, nerves strained, unable to sleep. Hollow-eyed from lack of rest, her face pale and haggard, she went about her household tasks with the mechanical movements of an automaton, set lessons for the children, and read stories to the small ones in a voice so devoid of expression it aroused their criticism.

"We like Mary's stories better than yours, Mama," Charles informed her, with childish candour.

"The story about the bear is the most exciting. Mary pretends she is the bear and growls. She lets us growl too. You never pretend, Mama." Appy's tone was accusing.

"Then we shall ask Mary to be the story-teller," their mother said, and sent Hannah to summon Mary.

After she had settled the children in their beds Mary sought her mother in the sewing room and watched her rip the seams of one of her winter gowns. "What are you doing, Mama?" she asked.

"I'm going to make a dress for you, dear." Laura smoothed the soft, blue material flat on the table. "You've grown tall these last months, so tall I'm afraid your winter frock will no longer fit you. I think this one of mine will make up into quite a nice dress. We are almost of a size now, and the colour will be just right for your eyes and hair. Your old frock will do nicely for Charlotte."

"But Mama, it is your best winter gown! How can you bear to cut it down for me?" Mary protested.

"I have others that will do quite well, dear. A woman has no need of such fancy gowns when her husband is ill and we are at war. I'm so glad I remembered it. I've been wondering where I could find enough woollen cloth to make you a warm dress. It is impossible to

get new material now."

Mary burst into tears. "You do think about us, Mama! You do love us!"

Startled, Laura placed an arm about her daughter's waist and kissed her cheek. "Of course I love you!"

"For weeks you've seemed so quiet and sad. You don't talk with us as you used to, or laugh, or play games. I asked Fan if she thought you were ill. She says you are worried about Papa. Are you, Mother? Is something wrong? Please tell me!"

"I am worried about your father, Mary, but we can do nothing for him until Dr. Spencely comes again, except pray to God every night to make him well." A tear ran down her face and she wiped it away absentmindedly.

"The war has changed everything for us, hasn't it! We used to be such a happy family, and now you and Papa seem to forget about us. What is wrong, Mama? Don't shut us out. We're your children and we love you very much."

Mary's words ended in a convulsive sob and she clung to her mother. Laura held her close, stroked her hair, and thought about what her daughter had said, remembering her small son's criticism of the stories she told them. She had been too preoccupied with her own thoughts to be aware of the children's reaction to the apparent estrangement between her and James. Somehow, she must make him see that his depression, their unspoken anxiety about his health was affecting the happiness of the children.

Laura's half-brother, Charles, was quick to notice her unhappiness. Recovered from his illness, he had stopped at Queenston to visit the Secords before returning to Burlington to rejoin the militia.

"Is something troubling you, Sister?" he asked when she opened the door to him upon his arrival. "Your appearance has changed so much since the morning you came into my room at Ann's house when you were on your way to Beaver Dams. In spite of my fever I noticed

how eager and animated you were. I marvelled at the brightness of your countenance when you were on such a dangerous errand, and I knew how apprehensive you were of the journey. I see none of that radiance in your face today. I hope you're not about to be ill."

"Does my concern show so much, Charles? No, I'm not ill, unless you would term sickness of heart an illness. I'm worried about James. For so many months he has brooded over the wound in his leg and his inability to serve his country. Since Dr. Spencely advised us that the limb may have to be amputated because the infection has begun to spread, his mind seems to have become warped. He scarcely speaks to the children, or to me for that matter, except to make a disdainful remark in answer to any question I may ask. He is so unlike his former self and seems to have no interest in anything except news of the war."

"The loss of a limb would, I think, be a difficult fact for any man to accept, particularly one as active as James has been. Would you like me to talk with him, Laura?"

She looked up at the young man who towered above her, appraised his eager face, watched him run slender fingers through a shock of unruly black hair in a gesture that reminded her, suddenly, of girlhood days when she lived in her father's house by the Thames River. Charles had been only six years old when she married James and went to St. David's to live. The merry-faced boy with the unmanageable hair had grown tall and handsome in the intervening years. He would be twenty-two now, she remembered, and thought how very much he resembled their father.

"Would you, Charles? Talk to him about the war. He is avid for news. Describe the tensions among our mother's neighbours at the Credit River the summer after Papa died, the strange sailing ships that were seen near the river's mouth and her fear that they would destroy the Port Credit settlement. Tell him how you escaped the Yankees during the capture of York when so many of your company were taken prisoner."

Charles smiled and placed an affectionate arm about

her shoulders. "You sound like our mother, Laura. Perhaps what James needs most of all is to talk about his disability, frankly, with another man. Let me try. You can trust me to be discreet."

The children claimed Charles's attention at every possible moment during the visit. With great good nature he answered their questions. He told them how the Yankees had invaded York only to withdraw their troops a week later, and how the militia blew up the fort's main powder magazine so that it would not fall into the hands of the enemy. He described the Yankees' destruction of the British ships in the harbour and their burning of the Parliament Buildings. He told them about Mistress Sally's house at Port Credit, the encampment on the river flats behind it of Indians whose presence gave her a feeling of security in the days immediately prior to the Yankee invasion of York. Wide-eyed, they listened in silence to the incidents he related and marvelled that they could claim proud relationship with this handsome uncle.

Laura rolled a new-knit scarf and a pair of woollen socks into a tight parcel and dropped it into her brother's portmanteau on the morning of his departure. "It has been good to see you, Charles. If it is possible to advise me of your whereabouts when you leave Burlington, please send me word by Dr. Spencely. My mind will be more at ease if I know where you are," she said.

When Dr. Spencely returned to Queenston he observed, upon examination of James's leg, that the festering sores surrounding the wound had spread no further. It was a good sign, he said, as he searched his bag for another jar of the Indian emollient and cautioned Laura to continue to apply it faithfully. If the infection could be controlled there would be no need for amputation.

Cheered by the doctor's pronouncement, James smiled as he reached out his hand and clasped Laura's. "My wife has been a faithful nurse. If there is improvement in the condition it is due to her ministrations."

Laura, moved by the affection in her husband's tone, wiped quick tears from her eyes. "No, no," she protested. "It is the salve the Indian emollient, that has arrested

the spread of the infection. I have done nothing except apply the ointment to the sores, and pray that they would heal."

Chapter 23

The Burning of Newark and St. David's

On a morning in mid-December a lone rider approached the Secord house. Laura and Charlotte stood together at the sitting room window to watch him come up the path from the gate, his horse moving slowly through the heavy snowdrifts. He was hunched low over his mount as if to draw warmth from the animal's body. In spite of the winter's chill he wore no greatcoat, and when he slid from his horse they could see that his clothes were torn; his hands, as they endeavoured to tether the animal, were transparently white and clumsy on the reins.

"Why, it is Lizzie Dean's Jake," Laura exclaimed and hurried to open the door.

"Come in to the fire. Bob will stable your horse," she said, as the man stumbled up the steps, shuffled past her into the sitting room, and slumped into a chair.

"The Yankees have burned Newark," he muttered, and began to rub his swollen hands.

"Ask Fan to fetch the rum. Get some snow, quickly." Laura's tone was urgent and Charlotte ran to do her bidding, returning with a bucket half filled with snow.

Greedy, Jake gulped the rum which Fan offered him, and when his hands had been thrust deep into the

cooling snow, blurted out his story, prodded by Laura's questions.

The Yankee militia who were in possession of Fort George had suddenly vacated the post, and before withdrawing to the American side of the river set a torch to the buildings at nearby Newark. Caught by a wind from the lake, the flames had spread from house to house in moments, destroying the entire town. Jake was on his way home from Burlington, having been given leave of absence because Lizzie was ailing, and as he approached Newark had seen the flames. "Scary, it was, Ma'am, the way the fire spread so fast, and all the women and children huddled together, shivering, at the edge of the town. They were shaking their fists and crying as they watched their houses go up in flames. Nigh on four hundred of them are homeless."

"The poor creatures!" Laura exclaimed in a shocked voice. "We must do something to help them, Jake."

"Yes, Ma'am. I've been stopping at every farmhouse along the way to find shelter for them. I was wondering if you would send Bob to ask the people of Queenston if they could take some of them in. I'd like to get home to Lizzie as soon as I can."

"Indeed, yes, Jake! Bob will go to warn the neighbours at once, and then drive the sleigh to Newark. We must send blankets and buffalo robes to wrap about the children. You've done a fine deed, Jake. Lizzie can be proud of you."

When James learned that Newark had been burned he predicted that the British would retaliate immediately. It was too great an insult to be endured.

"And to what end?" Laura asked impatiently. "What good will come of it— More women, more innocent children will be made to suffer. If we follow the Yankees' example we shall be judged as wanton and ruthless as they." You don't understand Laura. This is war. The Yankees must be taught a lesson. Let them go free this time and they will strike again. Our homes, villages, the women and children must be protected." There was a flush of anger in James's cheeks as he spoke.

It was Robert Dexter, in command of a company of

militia stationed at Queenston, who brought the Secords news of the retaliation. He and James sat by the library fire, while he described the thoroughness of the British attack. Laura, near the window, was endeavouring to catch the last moments of daylight, as her knitting needles clicked busily in an effort to turn the heel of a sock she held in her hands. The regulars had struck swiftly, Robert said. Within a week of the burning of Newark they had driven the Yankees from Fort Niagara, ravaged the American side of the river as far as Buffalo Creek, and burned every fort and village along the way.

"It is no more than just retribution for the attack on Newark." James eased his leg onto a low stool as he spoke.

Laura rose, laid her knitting aside, secured a taper from the drawer of a small table, and went to light the candles in their sconces. When she had finished she knelt on the hearthrug between the men and stretched her hands toward the warmth of the fire. "We are no better than the Yankees," she said, turning to Robert, her voice shrill with emotion. "To fight a war in defence of our country is one thing. Wanton destruction of the homes and property of innocent people is another. The Yankees burned Newark and those who suffered most were women and helpless children. Now the British have struck back and again it is the women and children who have been driven from their homes. The Yankees are no doubt already plotting revenge and when they come back it may be your house or ours that is reduced to ashes."

"I agree that it is the innocent who suffer most often in any war," Robert replied, "but I also know that if we are ever to have peace in Upper Canada it is necessary for the British to show their strength at this point. The Yankees may return, yes, but they are less likely to do so than they would be if this act of wanton destruction at Newark had gone unpunished."

"And in the meantime we shall sleep uneasily in our beds, wondering when the next enemy attack is to be launched and where it will be aimed. Will this dreadful war ever end, Robert?"

Her voice broke on the last words and she hurried

from the room, not answering James's startled question, "What's come over you, Laura?"

The pressures of each day's events were trying her patience almost beyond endurance. The women and children whom Bob had brought from Newark were still guests in the Secord house. Full of compassion for their plight, Laura had taken them in, had rearranged her rooms to make space for the Widow Simpson and her four children. A bed was set up in the sewing room for young Katie Smith and her ailing mother, while Appy's discarded cradle was refurbished for Katie's small baby. It was understood that her husband, Johnny would take them to Burlington to live with his parents as soon as he could obtain leave of absence from the militia. Generously, Laura shared her children's clothing and her own with the guests, made the necessary alterations, and with willing hands knit socks and mittens for them. Fan's ingenuity was taxed to the limit in providing nourishing food in sufficient quantities to satisfy the children's ravenous appetites. In the warm, moist kitchen she fed them large bowls of cornmeal mush for breakfast and homebaked bread with succulent stews for dinner and, if the quantity of gravy overbalanced that of the meat, only Fan was aware of it. Horrified by the poor table manners displayed by the Simpson children, she constantly scolded them for their rudeness.

"You mustn't badger them, Fan," Laura cautioned, when the servant girl complained to her that the "homeless waifs" were beginning to exert a bad influence on the Secord children. "They've been through a shocking experience, and we must do our best to erase it from their minds. Make them feel welcome here. Feed them well and stop worrying about their table manners. I'll ask Mary to help you manage them."

"Ma'am, the flour is getting low in the barrel, and we've only two crocks of apple butter left. I try to be as saving as I can, but the loaves of bread are eaten as fast as I make them. What are we to do when the flour barrel is empty? I worry about it, Ma'am."

"Yes, Fan, I worry too, but I can't let those poor women think they are a burden to us. I'm sure we'll be

able to obtain more flour when spring comes. It will be maple syrup time in another month. Try to make the apple butter last until then."

Eventually, the Widow Simpson found accommodation with relatives and departed with many apologies for the behaviour of her son William, who had repeatedly teased Appy's kitten until the animal clawed his wrists. He had been rude to Bob and Fan, made life miserable for the younger Secord children, and, as a last offence, had broken the lustreware sugar basin given Laura by Mrs. Shipman.

Katie Smith waited, anxiously, for her husband's arrival. She gave little trouble to anyone, offered assistance to Fan in the kitchen, helped Laura with her mending, and performed many small tasks unasked. She kept to her room much of the time except when driven out by her mother's nagging criticism of Johnny.

"You mark my words, he's not coming back to you. Anyone can tell he's deserted you. I think he has been lying to you, Katie. He would have come for us by now if he intended to."

The door to the sewing room was open and Laura, climbing the stairs to her bedroom, overheard the mother's words and was puzzled by them. When Robert Dexter came to the house to talk with James she asked him to make inquiries about Johnny Smith. Unable to forget the remarks she had overheard, she began to observe Katie's downcast face more closely; she saw the growing worry in her eyes and the tenseness of her body and wondered how she might help her.

Spring came to the peninsula, and as the days grew warmer Katie began to take long walks, sometimes with the baby in her arms, occasionally alone. When Laura suggested that Mary or Charlotte might accompany her, Katie shook her head. "Johnny will be coming soon. Maybe I'll meet him today," she said and hurried off to avoid further conversation.

One evening in May Robert Dexter called at the Secord house and asked to speak to James and Laura privately. His face was grave as he closed the door of the library and told them what he had learned about Katie's

husband.

Johnny Smith was no longer with the militia. He had been seen some months earlier, along with several other men as they left the Yankee militia base at Fort Niagara. American money was found in his pockets when he was apprehended, and he was accused of selling information to the Yankees. While his companions were being charged with treason he had escaped with the ringleader and only recently been recaptured. He had been tried, convicted as a traitor, and was now lodged in the jail at Ancaster, Robert said, waiting to be hanged with the others.

"Poor Katie! How horrible for her! How can we tell her?" There were tears of compassion in Laura's eyes as she whispered the question.

"They must be got out of our house at once. Laura, you will please tell them to go tomorrow. I will not have us accused of harbouring traitors." In an effort to control his rage, James gripped the arms of his chair until the knuckles of his hands stood out white against the dark wood.

"Katie is not a traitor, James. I'm sure she can know nothing of her husband's activities, nor her mother either."

"They are to leave here tomorrow. It will be believed that they are traitors whether there is truth in it or not. We can't keep them any longer. Give them money, if you will, and food, but send them away."

"Where can they go, James? We can't turn them out unless we know they have some other place of refuge. That would be inhuman."

"I think perhaps the best way to handle the situation would be for me to send them to Burlington, under militia escort," Robert said. "When the word gets about, and people's tempers rise, as yours has, James, those women will be vulnerable to petty attack wherever they are. They may be harassed; perhaps even stoned in the street. Anything can happen."

"Do what you will so long as you see that they leave my house," James said emphatically.

"Poor little Katie! How can I tell her that her

Johnny is a traitor, waiting to be hanged?" Laura looked first at James, then at Robert.

"I think it might be easier for everyone if you leave that task to me, Laura." Robert rose from his chair and began to pace back and forth across the floor. "I'll send someone to fetch them to headquarters in the morning. It will be best to break the news about Johnny there. Let them sleep in peace tonight."

When Laura entered the kitchen the next morning Katie's mother was seated near the stove, wringing her hands and sobbing. At sight of Laura she blurted out the words, "Katie's gone, and the baby too."

"Hush, she can't have gone far. We'll find her." Laura spoke with more assurance than she felt as she remembered the desperation she had seen in the young girl's eyes.

"I drove her to it, Mrs. Secord. I didn't like her husband and I tried to make her see that he was a good-for-nothing, irresponsible fellow. I shouldn't have done it. She was crying when she came in after her walk last evening. I think she must have stolen out again after I fell asleep. Her pillow hasn't been slept on. Where would she go, Mrs. Secord? Please help me! Oh God, I didn't mean to hurt her. I was only trying to warn her."

"Of course we'll help you," Laura promised, and sent Bob to the militia camp with a message for Robert Dexter.

James, when told of Katie's disappearance, agreed that the mother must remain until the daughter was found. "If the girl knew of her husband's sentence she may be trying to reach Ancaster in the hope of seeing him. The militia will find her before she goes very far."

Katie Smith and her baby were found by a fisherman who saw the bodies floating in the river. The tears streamed down Laura's cheeks as she helped Fan prepare them for burial and pondered the motive for the young girl's suicide. Had she known more about Johnny than they thought possible? Was it her mother's insinuations that had driven Katie to this last desperate act, or had she somehow become aware that the Secords were about to send her away? Laura wiped away a tear that

had fallen on the dead girl's face, brushed the hair smoothly over her brow, tied it with one of Charlotte's ribbons, and placed a nosegay of wood violets on her breast before Fan began to fasten the linen sheet that would serve as a shroud for mother and child.

"I was so blind," Laura sobbed when Katie's mother had departed. "I should have made more effort to help Katie. I knew she was unhappy, yet I did nothing to comfort her beyond speaking a few cheerful words when we were together."

James reached out his hand, pulled her down beside his chair and held her tightly in his arms while he tried to comfort her. "It is not always possible to recognize another's unhappiness, nor is it necessarily wise to try. Katie was destined for misfortune from the time she met Johnny, as her mother said. She must have been very desperate to have been driven to suicide, but would her despair not have been greater if she had lived to see her husband hanged as a traitor. No, Lolly, there was nothing you could do that you have not already done. You were kind to her, probably more kind than anyone has ever been in her whole life. You must not harbour feelings of guilt."

Her sobs ceased as she knelt beside him, secure with his arms about her, and she began to realize that the tragedy of Katie's death had brought her and James closer together than they had been for many weeks.

The Yankees returned to Niagara in July, intent upon wresting the fertile peninsula from the British. Fierce battles were fought at Chippawa and Lundy's Lane, and in every town and village along the road from Burlington to Fort George, the women, children, and old men waited anxiously, uncertain where the enemy would strike next. British troops and Canadian militia fought side by side to repulse the invaders, and in the end the Americans were forced to retreat. Again, there was burning and looting. When the village of St. David's was set on fire Ann Secord and her sister-in-law, Polly, fled to Queenston.

"Our home has been destroyed, and the grist mill Stephen built before he died, the house where you and James used to live, everything in the village. The Yankees have set fire to all the buildings. Polly says that the barns on David's farm, his house, and all their possessions are burned. Their cattle and sheep have been driven off by the soldiers. There is nothing left, nothing at all. Can you give us shelter, Laura?" Ann's voice trembled and her shoulders shook uncontrollably.

At work in her vegetable garden, Laura had seen the two pathetic figures turn in at the gate and had run to meet them.

Now, with an arm about each one, she half led them to the house. "Sit here on the stoop and rest while I make you a cup of tea," she said and eased Ann into a chair.

She turned to David's wife who had sunk down on the top step. "Loosen Ann's shoes, and your own," she said. "I'll ask Fan to bring a basin of water so that you can bathe your feet. It will soothe them."

Between sobs the younger woman whispered, "Laura, we have no shoes. There wasn't time to put them on." She pulled her long skirts aside to display bruised, blood-spattered feet. "We've nothing but the clothes on our backs. I ran out of the house just as I was because the fire was spreading so fast. The village was all ablaze so I ran through the fields, into the woods, and followed the path that leads to the Queenston road. I met Ann on the path through the woods, and we came on together. Never have I seen Ann so upset. She was almost hysterical with fear, and so was I."

James came out onto the uncovered porch as Laura returned with the tea and, when he was told about the destruction of St. David's, thrust his cane down on the stones with such force that it was split in half. Mary, on whose arm he leaned, was hard pressed to save him from falling. "This deed will not go unpunished," he exploded.

Charles and Appy, who had gathered about their aunts, scrambled away quickly, frightened by the anger in their father's voice.

"Sit down, James," Laura said firmly, and when he had done so she handed him a cup of currant tea. "You

are upsetting the children. What is done is done. Let us be thankful we have shelter to offer our sisters."

"I wish I knew where David is," Polly Secord said, wistfully. "I'd like him to know what has happened, and where he can find us. He was so proud of our house, and the barns and the outbuildings. Our livestock was the finest in the peninsula, he used to say. Now everything has been destroyed. We have nothing. I'm afraid it will be a hard blow for him."

"I should think David must be somewhere in the Niagara peninsula, Polly, and will hear what has happened soon enough. I think he will know that you've come to us," James assured her.

He turned to Laura. "Ann and Polly will need to rest. Should we not go inside?"

"Yes, James, as soon as we've finished our tea. Ann was so exhausted that I thought she ought to rest before going upstairs. I've sent Harriet to make their rooms ready. While they are lying down I must find a change of clothing for each of them. Their garments are so snagged and torn they will have to be laundered and mended before they are wearable again. I wonder if there are any women's shoes among the merchandise that was moved from the shop."

"There are three pairs, Mama, and some, Indian moccasins as well," Mary interrupted. "I'll fetch them so Aunt Ann and Aunt Polly can try them on."

Laura placed a hand on Ann's arm and helped her to rise. "It will be pleasant to have you with us, Sister, although I wish the circumstances were happier. You were very good to my brother Charles, when he was ill. Perhaps I may be able to repay some of your kindness now. You and Polly are to feel that you are part of our family, as indeed you are. Come, I'm sure Harriet must have your beds made up. Try to sleep for an hour or so if you can."

In the evening, when the house was quiet, the children asleep, and their unexpected guests had retired for the night, Laura talked with James about the Yankees' latest outrage. "It must be a dreadful experience to lose one's home and all one's possessions in the space of a few

moments as Ann has done. Polly and David have lost everything too, but somehow it seems worse for Ann because she no longer has Stephen to lean on."

"I shall tell Ann that she is to consider our house her home," James said. "Before Stephen died I promised him I would look out for her until their boys were grown and I did so, as you know, until the war began. Perhaps when the fighting is ended she will live with one of them. If not, I know you will be glad to have her here, and so shall I."

"Dear Ann, she was a kind sister to me when we lived at St. David's." Laura sighed and brushed a loosened strand of hair back from her face. "What would we do, James, if the Yankees should set fire to Queenston? Where could we go?"

She had bathed and dressed his leg, using the Indian salve freely, and while he lay upon the bed, pondering her question, she crossed the room to wash her hands at the commode.

"I don't really know, Laura. So much would depend on the circumstances." After a prolonged silence he went on, "I don't think the Yankees will attempt to burn Queenston even if they should attack us. There are British troops stationed here now, as well as the militia. They are more likely to burn and loot less-protected areas where there is small chance of being caught. The officer who gave the order to burn St. David's should be hanged. If I could get my hands on him. . . ." His angry words trailed off into silence and he covered his face with his hands.

There were tears of pity in Laura's eyes as she turned from the wash stand and went to sit on the edge of the bed beside him. Impatience with his helplessness and the frustration caused by his inability to actively join in the struggle for his country's survival were making his temper flare too readily. Had he forgotten that his injury was the direct result of an almost superhuman effort to defend Upper Canada, that in an earlier battle General Brock had lost his life? Could he not see how very fortunate he was to be alive?

Following Dr. Spencely's instructions, she began to

rub the injured leg with gentle, probing fingers in order to increase the circulation of blood to the area. The sores were healing. She could detect infection in only one small area now.

Presently James uncovered his face, placed an arm about her shoulders, and said apologetically, "I'm sorry, Lolly. Please forgive me."

She smoothed his hair with caressing fingers. "There is no need to be apologetic. I feel anger too, when I think what it must mean to the people of St. David's to lose their homes and their lifetime possessions; what a hardship it is for Ann, for David and Polly to begin again to build a home, to acquire all the beautiful furnishings they had gathered about them. Ann is no longer young, James, nor is David, although he has a wife who is youthful and vigorous."

"They possess a rugged courage that will stand them in good stead. If David survives the war we need not be too concerned about him and Polly. His ability to acquire wealth and possessions is almost equal to that of Richard Cartwright. They are both men of considerable means. David's buildings and livestock may have been destroyed, but he has six hundred acres of fertile land that will produce fine crops again when the times are normal. In the meantime each of us will have to share his possessions with the other."

She leaned closer to him, placed a kiss on his forehead, and said, "In spite of the unexpected things that are happening I feel content when your arms are around me, and we can talk as we used to. I found it very difficult to endure the kind of silence that prevailed between us for a time last year. Why did we shy away from our trouble? Why could we not have faced it together? That was a wretched time, James."

He held her close against him, with his face brushing her hair, and whispered, "Those were bad days, indeed, Lolly. I'd like to forget them."

Summer faded into autumn while the struggle for the peninsula continued back and forth across its length and breadth with little real success for either side. In the mud and slush of a wet November the Yankee com-

mander withdrew his troops to the American side of the border, destroying Fort Erie as he went, and the fighting in the Niagara peninsula ceased.

The snow lay deep over the earth, and the new year was already well established before the news reached Queenston that the war was over; a treaty of peace had been signed on Christmas Eve.

Two early watercolours by J.W. Colton show what Laura Secord's house, located at the northwest corner of Queen and Partition Streets, Queenston, looked like in 1800. The house is still standing. It has been restored by Laura Secord Candies Ltd., and is open to the public as a museum.

Courtesy: John Ross Robertson Collection, Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library.



Part 4

A New Era

Chapter 24

A Daughter Grows Up

Laura laid her pen down carefully on the polished surface of the library table and reached out a hand to caress her daughter's cheek. "I wonder if you know how difficult it is for me to believe that you are going to be married; in a few weeks you will have gone to a home of your own, Mary," she said. "Perhaps if there had been no war, if your father weren't ill, I might have been more aware

that you were growing up. Strange as it may seem to you, I feel as if I were dreaming, that in a few moments I shall waken to find you are still a little girl. I hope you will be happy, Darling. We shall miss you very much."

Mary came to stand beside her and placed an arm about her shoulders. There were sudden tears in the young girl's eyes as she pushed the muslin cap aside and stroked Laura's forehead. "I shall miss all of you, Mama. I wish we need not go so far away immediately, but it seems we must. The British army requires the services of surgeons in the West Indies, and William has volunteered to go. We were so afraid Papa might refuse to let us marry now. He was so kind to William; he said he understood how it was with young people who are in love. Thank you both for being such sympathetic parents. I wouldn't want to live without William, Mother. I love him so much."

Amazed at the depth of feeling in her daughter's voice, Laura replied, "We want you to be happy, Mary. I must confess I would feel more content if the island of Jamaica were not so remote from Upper Canada. Who will care for you if you should become ill?"

"Don't fret, Mama. We are both in the best of health and William will take good care of me. If I weren't sad because I know I shall not see you or Papa or the others for a very long time I would think it a wonderful adventure to travel to a country about which I know nothing. Mama, do you realize I've never in my whole life been farther away from Queenston than to Burlington Heights?"

"That is true, Mary. It is also true that a good many people have lived their entire lives in the Niagara peninsula without travelling more than twenty miles from their homes. Here are you, scarcely seventeen, about to embark on a longer journey than any one of our family has undertaken as yet. I hope it will prove to be a happy experience for you."

Laura flexed her fingers, rubbing them in an effort to banish the nagging pain from joints that so often seemed to be swollen now, and picked up the quill pen. "Come dear, we must finish these invitations. Your

Grandmother Ingersoll's letter and your Aunt Elizabeth's must go to York by the first messenger." She smiled, thoughtfully, and added, "If it is possible for Mistress Sally to come, I'm sure she will insist upon seeing her first grandchild married."

"Will Aunt Madge make the journey from Kingston, do you think?" Mary asked.

"I doubt that she will attempt to travel so far at this time of the year, particularly since your Uncle Richard is no longer there to accompany her, but I'm certain she will like to be invited. Her note must be sent to York with the others. If it should take a month for the letter to go from York to Kingston, as has sometimes happened in the past, it is possible that she may not receive the invitation early enough to make the journey, in any event."

Slowly and painstakingly, Laura wrote the notes while Mary fashioned small bows of white satin and affixed one in the left-hand corner of each missive. When the last one was finished those intended for friends in the village or the peninsula were wrapped in clean gauze and placed in a drawer ready for Bob to deliver at the appropriate time. It was fortunate, she thought, that James had found the bolt of white ribbon among other items in his prewar stock of goods. The bows gave the invitations a gay look. She would have liked to see Mary married in a gown of white silk had it been possible to obtain the material. When she spoke of it to James he had become angry, declaring that it would have to be imported and the cost would be so prohibitively high that he could not afford to order such material except in quantities larger than he would be able to dispose of when times were bad.

Mary had overheard the conversation and insisted immediately that she did not want an expensive gown. "I would like to be married in your wedding dress, Mama. May I wear it, please?" she had begged, and so it was decided.

Fan brought in the tea tray, and when Mary had eaten her scone and emptied her cup she hurried away to remind Bob that it was time to harness the horse to the sleigh and drive her down to James's shop.

Left alone, Laura poured a second cup of tea and sat

down by the fire. Mary Dexter would come in presently to help her with the alterations to the sprigged muslin gown she had worn on the day of her marriage to James. Luckily, she had discovered a quantity of the same material in the box with the dress and used it to fashion gloves with frills at the wrist to complement the bridal gown. She brushed a hand across her forehead as if to make certain that she was indeed awake and that it was not all a dream – Mary's impending marriage and her courtship by the impatient young Dr. Trumbull who was assistant surgeon to His Majesty's 37th Regiment of Foot. Neither she nor James had thought of Mary as more than a child until that day last June when Dr. Spencely arrived from Burlington with news that the peace treaty had at last been ratified by the United States. The Canadian militia, he said, would soon disband and he would shortly return to Queenston to resume his practice.

He had brought with him a young man, Dr. Trumbull, who was his wife's nephew, because he wished to obtain another professional opinion regarding James's leg injury.

She remembered that James had taken an immediate liking to the young surgeon, perhaps because his hands were so skilful as he examined the leg, perhaps because he advocated removal of all the dressings and exposure of the affected area to the sun and air. Dr. Trumbull had expressed satisfaction with the manner in which the sores surrounding the wound had healed, and although he predicted that James would always walk with a limp, using a walking-stick in order not to overtax the strength of the limb, had assured them that there was very little danger of further infection. With this pronouncement the hovering spectre of amputation had vanished completely from her mind.

While the men lingered to talk with James and discuss the details of the peace treaty, Mary and Charlotte had fetched cakes and a jug of raspberry cordial from the kitchen. Dr. Trumbull was quick to rise, take the tray from Mary's hands, and assist the girls in serving the cool beverage. She had noticed, idly, that he chose a seat

beside her eldest daughter and that the two seemed to engage in a conversation of interest only to them, while Charlotte climbed the stairs to ask Ann Secord and Polly to join the others. She remembered that Mary's face was flushed pink with excitement as they talked, and she made a mental note to ask James if he had noticed how pretty their daughter was becoming. Presently, they moved out onto the stoop to enjoy the warmth of the June sunshine, and as they sat indulging in animated conversation James's brother, David, newly discharged from the militia, had ridden to the door. After embracing his wife and greeting the others, he sat down beside Polly, with her hand on his knee, his thin legs stretched toward the sun, and announced that, incredibly, in two and a half years of war the boundary between the two countries had not changed, nor had either side gained any territory. Immediately, James argued that something had surely been achieved if the people of Upper Canada were able to convince the Yankees that they preferred to remain loyal to King George of England and had never sought to be liberated from British domination. David had agreed and expressed the hope that the inhabitants of both countries would henceforth maintain a friendly relationship. Only a few people had wanted war. Many residents of the eastern states – Maine, Vermont, and New York – had in general been against such a move. Neither country could hope to prosper unless they lived at peace with each other. There would, he thought, be very strong resistance to any idea of future conflict between the two countries.

Annoyed by the prolonged conversation about the war, Laura had burst forth indignantly to remind David that the people of Canada had sacrificed a good deal. Had he not lost all his possessions when St. David's was burned? Had James not sustained a serious injury in battle? She remembered the shrill note of emotion that crept into her voice as she continued to protest until David interrupted her to explain that he meant only that there had been no loss of territory on either side. He had placed a hand over that of his wife and added, "Polly knows I feel badly enough about the personal sufferings

of our friends. Thank God the war is over!"

"Thank God, indeed," Dr. Spencely had echoed as he rose to take his departure.

"You must come again," she had said to William Trumbull when Dr. Spencely explained that the young man was spending a well-earned leave of absence with his aunt at Queenston. When James repeated the invitation the young man offered to massage the injured leg each day.

They had seen a good deal of Dr. Trumbull while he remained at Queenston and grown fond of the impetuous, ginger-haired Irishman whose freckled face seemed to break into an engaging grin whenever he spoke. Preoccupied with domestic problems posed by her enlarged household, she had failed to notice that he and Mary were deriving great pleasure from each other's company.

She had experienced both shock and sorrow when Robert Hamilton, upon his return from a journey to Montreal, called to tell them that Richard Cartwright had died. Her brother-in-law had been a forceful, positive man who, because of his superior knowledge of public affairs, frequently dominated the conversation in any gathering of which he was a member, to the degree that he and James often clashed. He had been a dear, kind friend to her, although James, in sudden anger, sometimes described his sister's husband as pompous and overbearing. Now, as she thought of Madge and the strong abiding love that had existed between her and Richard, she wiped a tear from her eye. How would her sister-in-law exist without the dynamic husband who had directed and controlled so large a part of her life, who had gathered wealth and power to himself while holding the respect of all who knew him? He had been a persuasive figure in the legislature, Robert Hamilton said, and although he had many friends in the United States, had never ceased his endeavours to prevent the seizure of Upper Canada by the Yankees. At least he had lived to see the end of the war and know that his Loyalist friends would continue to live as British subjects.

James had reopened his shop when those men who had served in the militia began to return to their homes.

Discouraged by the inflationary prices of such commodities as were available, the fact that most transactions were conducted in trade and that little real money was available, he worried constantly about the future. Handicapped in everything he did by his injured leg, he was unable to tend the shop without an assistant to move the loads of potash, barrels of flour, rum, and other bulk items he must either stock or receive in trade. The sons of his late brother Stephen helped him when able to do so but, intent upon rebuilding their mother's house at St. David's, they had little time to spare. Bob did what he could, moving the heavy objects while Laura and Mary took their turns behind the counter. Laura was aware that James had not liked to see his wife and daughter serving the public, the sailors who came from ships that docked at Queenston, strangers passing through the village on their way to York or London, or Indians from the upper lakes. He had declared that he would close the shop and seek other employment unless business improved within the year so that he could afford to pay a dependable assistant.

In the autumn, William Trumbull had called one day to tell them that he would be stationed at Queenston for a part of the winter. She remembered now that Mary's face had grown pink and her eyes had sparkled when she heard the news. During the weeks that followed he had been a frequent visitor. She had thought he called, primarily, to see James until one evening when he stayed to supper and Mary came to the table with her blonde hair piled high on her head. Aware, suddenly, that her daughter was a strikingly pretty young girl, she had been conscious also of William's interest. She had soon forgotten the incident, and when James informed her a few weeks later that William Trumbull had asked him for Mary's hand in marriage she listened with disbelieving ears. When she protested that Mary was too young to marry, James disagreed with her, stating that in a new country many young women were wed at an early age and cited Mira's marriage as an example. "Our daughter is more mature than we think it is possible for her to be because we are her parents. It would be unwise

to deny her this happiness, Lolly. She is deeply in love and William worships her. He is a fine young man. I shall be proud to call him my son-in-law. Go and talk with her," he had urged.

She found Mary in the kitchen, engaged in washing Appy's hair. When she looked up and saw her mother she ran with arms outstretched to hug her and exclaimed, "Please be happy for me, Mama. I love William so very much."

Driplets of water from Mary's hands trickled down her mother's neck as she stood there, eyes searching the eager young face for confirmation of her words. She and Mary had cried, while their conversation flowed rapidly, and Appy, her head bent obediently over a basin of water, protested loudly that the soap was hurting her eyes. Laura had rescued Appy from her uncomfortable position, brushed the silken curls, and placed her in a chair near the kitchen stove so that her hair would dry. "We must begin to fill your bride's chest," she said, and placed a kiss on Mary's forehead.

In her mind she had already begun to plan for the tasks that must be completed in the months ahead. There were quilts to be made and linen sheets that must be woven if they could not be obtained otherwise. She would see that the gowns, capes, gloves – all the items of apparel a bride would require – were meticulously sewn. The weeks of Mary's betrothal would be happy ones, a time when they would learn to know each other, not only as mother and daughter, but as woman and woman.

Idly she asked whether William would continue to be stationed at Queenston and Mary had made the shattering reply, "Why Mama, I thought Papa would have told you! William is being posted to Jamaica at the beginning of May. We want to be married as soon as possible so that I can go with him."

Now the invitations were written, the guests bidden for the eighteenth of April. A few days afterward Mary would accompany her husband to a strange land where they would begin a new life together. Laura could not hope to see her daughter again for several years. Suddenly she felt cheated, deprived of the weeks she should

have had with this new Mary who had grown to womanhood so suddenly.

She rose from her chair presently, replaced the tea cups on the tray, and carried it to the kitchen. She had made a decision. Nothing must be allowed to occur that would mar her daughter's happiness. She would enjoy to the full the days that were left, fill the bride's chest as generously as possible, and make certain that Mary's wedding was a joyous event so that her memories of it would be happy ones.

Chapter 25

Mary's Wedding

Laura sat in the front pew of the church while Mary and William repeated the solemn words of the marriage service. Occasionally, her eyes strayed to the bare walls and the clear glass windowpanes, and she thought how austere this new makeshift building was in comparison with the old St. Mark's Church where their family had so often worshipped. The mellowed wood of the walls, the bell with the rich deep tone, and the stained-glass windows were gone forever, she thought regretfully, destroyed when Newark was burned by the Yankees.

James sat beside her, and on the unyielding bench her hand was clasped tightly in his. When she felt the pressure of his fingers she smiled faintly, remembering, as she knew he would be, that other day more than eighteen years ago when they had stood together beneath the towering oak tree in her father's garden. They had repeated similar words that launched them on their years of life together. Silently, she prayed that her daughter's marriage might be as happy and fulfilling as her own.

The sprigged muslin gown suited Mary's slight figure very well, she thought, and the gloves with the frivolous cuffs added a gay note to the costume. How pretty she was, and how dignified William looked in his scarlet coat and gray trousers! A ray of muted sunshine

came through the window to shimmer against the polished steel of his sword and light up the gold bracelet Laura's mother Betsy had worn on her wedding day.

"I must have something to wear that is borrowed," Mary had said as Laura adjusted the skirt of the bridal gown.

Mistress Sally, who had come from Port Credit for the wedding, sat close to her granddaughter, her eyes shining with pride, and upon hearing Mary's remark took the bracelet from her pocket. "Your grandfather gave this to me after we were married," she said. "I've never worn it because I thought your mother or one of her sisters should rightly have had it since it was originally a present to their mother. If you wish, you may borrow it to wear while you are being married, Mary. When you return from the church I shall give it to you as a wedding present."

Dear Mistress Sally! How frail she looked, sitting proud and straight in the pew! Laura reached out her free hand, rested it on her stepmother's knee, and observed the tears in the sunken eyes as she attempted to smile.

In a moment she knelt obediently with the others as the rector, a hand on the head of each, invoked the blessing of God upon Mary and William. The ceremony was almost over. When the register had been signed they would return to Queenston, and as soon as the invited guests arrived there would be toasts, congratulations, good wishes. After the bridal supper had been served there would be dancing. In sudden anxiety, she endeavoured to remember whether Fan had been instructed to lay a fire in the room Mary would share with her husband for the few days they were to spend with her and James. She had made up the fourposter bed with her best linen sheets yesterday, having shaken the dried rose petals from their folds and smoothed warm blankets over them, a patchwork quilt, and a fresh counterpane. There were new candles in the candlesticks, fresh water in the jug on the washstand. She had risen early in order to attend to the last details herself, making certain that the table in the dining room was laid with her finest linen

cloth and best silver spoons. The tiered wedding cake, rich with butter and eggs and luscious with dried fruits and butternuts, stood by itself on the sideboard, a knife beside it, in readiness for the bride to cut the first slice.

In answer to the pressure of James's fingers she rose as the tempo of the music accelerated and Mary, with her new husband, turned to walk toward them, followed by Charlotte and a young lieutenant from William's regiment. They paused and Mary threw eager arms about her mother and kissed her, murmuring, "I love you, Mama."

When she turned to embrace her father, William placed his arm across Laura's shoulders and bent to kiss her cheek. She looked deep into the young man's eyes and said, "Be good to our little girl, William, she is very precious to us," and when he nodded, too deeply moved to reply, she felt assured that this new son-in-law would indeed cherish her daughter.

In a moment they moved into the aisle to follow the bridal party, and Dr. Spencely reached out to shake hands with James, while his wife whispered, "I wish William's parents could have been here today. They would be proud of their son and pleased with his pretty wife. The Doctor and I are very glad to be able to act in their behalf. It will give us a deal of pleasure to hold the 'in-fair' for my nephew and his bride tomorrow evening. We've cleared the barn for dancing, and there will be cards in the sitting room for those who prefer less strenuous entertainment. I hope everything will go well. I've promised my sister a full account of the evening."

Laura smiled. "James and I wrote to William's parents at the time my husband gave his consent to the engagement, but of course we have not had a reply as yet. To us they are very special people. I wish it were possible to meet them face to face."

The days immediately following the wedding passed far too quickly. Mary and William seemed to be occupied every moment of the time prior to their departure, with friends who came to wish them well or gave impromptu parties in their honour. With the assistance of Charlotte, Laura packed the wedding presents and placed fragile

china among the folds of linen in the depths of the bride's chest. The new gowns and petticoats were pressed in meticulous layers in her daughter's trunk. "I shall need only summer clothing, Mama. William says it is never cold in Jamaica," Mary reminded her. Unbelieving, she had added a petticoat of fine white wool, a warm bedgown, and a heavy shawl, certain that Mary would thank her for having included them. When she consulted James he said Mary must have heavy clothing to wear on board ship until they were at least a few days out of Halifax. The stagecoach journey from Kingston to Montreal might prove to be uncomfortably cold at the beginning of May, and on the long trip down the St. Lawrence River to Halifax she should be warmly clothed.

While they talked, her brother Charles, who had accompanied Mistress Sally to Queenston for the wedding, came into the library to tell them that he had become engaged to Anna Merritt whose parents had been their friends through the years James and Laura lived at Queenston. When she expressed her delight and James shook his hand in congratulation, Charles said the betrothal would be announced at the party Anna's father and mother were giving in honour of Mary and William. "We shall be married before the end of the summer. Do you think our mother could stay with you until after the wedding?" he asked.

"Indeed, yes," James agreed.

Laura added, "You know Mistress Sally is always welcome here. We shall be glad to have her for whatever length of time she cares to remain with us."

On the morning of the first day of May every member of the family, except Mistress Sally, went down to the wharf to see Mary and William board the ship that would take them down the lake to Kingston on the first lap of their long journey. William would rejoin his regiment at Halifax. There would be other women on board the ship when they sailed for Jamaica, wives of other officers, with whom Mary would soon make friends, he assured Laura as he bade her goodbye. Sensing her concern, he had added that he and Mary would send a letter when they arrived at Halifax and again as soon as their destination was reached.

When they had gone, with loving farewells to everyone from Charlotte to Appy, when the ship pulled away from the dock and she could no longer see Mary's eager face smiling while the tears rolled down her cheeks, Laura rode home beside James in the carriage. The children, bubbling with excitement, chose to walk in the care of Charlotte and their Uncle Charles.

After they had ridden in silence for a time James spoke. "I think Mary has made a good marriage," he said, and when she did not reply he placed a hand over hers. "Don't be sad, Lolly. Children grow up, marry, and go to homes of their own. That is the way it should be. Neither you nor I would wish it to be otherwise. Few young women of Mary's age have an opportunity to travel to distant places. Let us be glad she is one of the fortunate number."

"James, do you realize we may never see either our daughter or her husband again. I've been able to think of nothing else this morning." Laura's words ended in a sob and James placed a protecting arm about her shoulders.

"That is a possibility, yes, but only a possibility. Put it from your mind, Laura. Try to remember that Mary and William are in love, that nothing else matters to them quite as much as being together. A wife must accompany her husband wherever he may be required to go, and Mary will make the journey to Jamaica with William. Our son-in-law will love her always, protect her with his life. Of that I am convinced. Can we ask for more, Laura? Come, dry your tears." When she did not reply he added in a lighter tone, "We have five other daughters who are growing up, my dear. Perhaps one of them may marry a husband who will live at Queenston or Niagara so that you and she can visit each other as often as you wish. That would make you happy, wouldn't it?"

Laura looked up at him and smiled, faintly. James did not understand that she had no wish to keep her daughter close to her. She desired only to be assured that Mary would be well and happy. How could she be certain of that when they were hundreds of miles apart. She sighed, reflecting that a woman's role in life was some-

times a difficult one. She loved a man and married him, bore his children and suffered the pains of childbirth gladly because of her love. In sickness or health she watched over the children, and when they reached young adulthood relinquished them, one by one, to those particular persons who were able to kindle the spark of love in their hearts. She had always believed that a woman was supposed to rejoice when her daughter married. Why then was there such pain in her heart, such a sense of loss? Did other women have similar feelings in the same circumstances, she wondered. Did they, too, stifle the urge to shed tears while they smiled and listened to the congratulations offered by friends?

Her reverie ended abruptly as the carriage stopped and Bob got down from his seat to assist James. Idly, she noticed that the wildflowers she and Bob had transplanted from the forest were in bloom beside the steps that led to the uncovered porch. She bent to touch the delicate blossoms as Fan opened the door and announced that there was a visitor in the sitting room.

“It’s the lady who gave you the lustreware sugar basin, Ma’am. She and Mrs. Ingersoll have been talking for almost an hour. I served them coffee and buttermilk biscuits just now.”

Chapter 26

A Family for the Dexters

When Laura entered the sitting room Mrs. Shipman rose and moved across the floor, her hands outstretched in greeting. Her eyes were anxious, her brow furrowed in a deep frown. "I had to come," she said. "I've done a very impulsive thing, Mrs. Secord, and I need to have your assurance that I was right to do it."

Laura greeted her warmly, nodded to her stepmother, and said, "Now tell me what you've done, Mrs. Shipman."

Before Mrs. Shipman could reply Mistress Sally got up from her chair, gathered her sewing into a pink silk bag and said, "I'll leave you to talk alone."

"No, stay," Mrs. Shipman begged. "I'd like to have your opinion also, Mrs. Ingersoll. It is about my niece, Mary Dexter."

"I'm sure that whatever you've done will be for Mary's good," Laura said.

"'Twas only good I intended, I assure you, but on the way to Queenston yesterday I began to have misgivings about whether or not I'm being fair to Mary, perhaps because Shipman said I was acting too hastily. Mrs. Secord, I've found a family for the Dexters, two boys of seven and five and a little girl of three."

"I don't understand what you mean. Whose children are they? Have they no parents?" Laura asked.

"Their mother died of tuberculosis a few days ago. The family have been living at the rear of our property on ten acres of land that Shipman rented to them. You may have noticed their cabin that day you walked through the Black Swamp with the message for Lieutenant Fitzgibbon."

Laura shook her head. "Where is their father? Have these children no other relatives? Why did you decide to bring them to Mary?"

"Their father was killed at the Battle of Lundy's Lane, two years ago, poor man. His mother lived with him and his wife and has done the best she could to help her daughter-in-law, but she is almost crippled by rheumatism now. For the past month or two I've cooked the meals, kept the house tidy and the children's clothes in order, and Shipman has been doing the farm chores ever since their mother became ill. The grandmother assures me that there are no other relatives who could look after the poor orphans. When we buried their mother, Shipman and I brought them home to our house, along with their grandmother. It seemed to us that we had no other choice. The little ones cried all through that first night and there was nothing I could do to comfort them. While I was cooking breakfast the next morning I began to think that perhaps Shipman and I were too old to be parents to such young children, and the idea came to me that Mary might like to have them. She loves children so much and it seems unlikely that she will have a family of her own. What is your opinion, Mrs. Secord? Don't you think they would make an ideal family for Mary and Robert?"

"What does the grandmother say? I should think she would want to keep them with her if she can," Laura said.

"She is willing to let Mary have them because I've assured her that they would have a good home with my niece. The poor woman was almost beside herself with worry until I asked if I might take them to Mary. Her health is poor, she has no income, and her only possessions are the meagre furnishings in the cabin. When Shipman and I talked about it we agreed that the grand-

mother could live with us but we must find younger parents for the children. I thought of Mary and Robert immediately, and when I saw how unhappy the boys were I packed them into the wagon yesterday and brought them to Queenston. Mary cried when the little girl hugged her and called her Mama. It would have done your heart good to see the joy in her eyes when I said I planned to leave them with her. You're frowning, Mrs. Secord. Do you think I was wrong to act so impulsively?"

"I don't know," Laura said, thoughtfully. "There may be legal implications. What happens to orphans who have no relatives? Is it possible for one person to decide what is best for these children? Mary and Robert would, I'm sure, be more than glad to rear them as their own family, but I wonder if you are being quite fair to the Dexters. If it were discovered, as time goes by, that there are kinfolk who desire custody of the children I should think Mary and Robert would be heartbroken and the effect on the little ones would be devastating."

She turned to Mistress Sally. "What do you think, Mother?"

"If you ask my opinion the most important step to be considered is to make certain those children remain together. Don't allow them to be separated. If the Dexters are willing to give them a home and can afford to do so, if the grandmother has really agreed to relinquish her son's children, I would leave them with Mary and cease to worry. Robert will be able to ascertain whether or not there is any legal procedure to be followed in order to be certain that his new family cannot be taken from him several years hence by some at present unknown relative. I think the children are very fortunate. Mrs. Shipman's plan is a sensible one."

The Dexters took their new-found family into their home and hearts, and before many weeks passed the boys, Peter and Jamie, ceased to fret for their mother and began to react happily to the affection shown them by everyone. Well aware of the demands her new family would make upon Mary's strength and energies, Laura sent her daughter Charlotte to assist in caring for them.

The magistrate at Niagara, with whom Robert con-

sulted about legal adoption of the children, promised to send all the information to the office of the Lieutenant-Governor at York. Robert felt encouraged by the magistrate's remark that unless other relatives appeared to claim them within a reasonably brief period of time it was almost certain the Dexters would be allowed to adopt them, their willingness to assume responsibility for three being a mark in their favour.

Immediately, Mistress Sally began to knit mittens, stockings, and vests in anticipation of the children's needs for the winter months. After Laura had sorted through boxes of clothing which Charles had outgrown, she altered a number of garments for Peter and Jamie, gave Appy's discarded crib a fresh coat of paint, and re-lined it with soft flannelette for the toddler Ellen. She discovered, as the days passed and new demands were made upon her energies, that the feeling of loss caused by her daughter's marriage lessened.

In July Madge Cartwright returned to Queenston to open her house for the summer months and brought with her mail from the newlyweds. Written at Halifax while they waited for the ship that would take them to Jamaica, Mary's letter was so filled with evidence of her happiness that Laura began to see, as James had maintained, that it had been right for her to marry William and that she would be happy anywhere as long as she was with him.

"They are a fine young couple," her sister-in-law said. "I was very pleased that they could stay a night and day with me at Kingston while awaiting the stagecoach to Montreal. Until I saw them I hadn't realized how many years have passed since I was last at Queenston. How quickly our children grow up, Laura! Mary was just a child the summer before war began. What a lovely young woman she has become, and what a fine man her husband is! Richard would have liked William for his forthright manner, his thoughtfulness, and Irish humour. You are a very fortunate woman, Sister."

"Will you stay at Queenston now, Madge?" Laura asked.

"I should like to end my days here, if I could. Queen-

ston seems more like home to me than Kingston, perhaps because my brothers are close by. However, for a year or two at least, I expect to spend the winters there. Now that the war is over be assured I shall come back during the summer as long as I am able to do so."

"I'm very glad, Madge. I missed your visits while the war was being fought. I've missed Richard too, his booming voice, his confident assurance. You and he would have been a source of strength to me had you been here after James was wounded. When I needed advice it seemed there was no one to whom I could turn. Perhaps I would have leaned on Richard too heavily, instead of learning to make my own decisions as I was forced to do. The war was a bad time for all of us, Sister."

"It was, indeed, but it is over now and I'm glad to be here. The journey is a tedious one at present, but I believe travel facilities will improve as the country develops. There are rumours at Kingston that the stagecoach service to and from Montreal will be extended as far as York next year. Whether or not it will make the trip a less tiring one remains to be seen. I'm sure that eventually it will mean an improvement in transportation, particularly during those months when ships are unable to sail. In the weeks before he died Richard said, repeatedly, that he was convinced there are prosperous years ahead for the people of Upper Canada."

"Do you think so, Madge? Before the war began everyone believed that the future seemed promising for the people of our country. Now I'm doubtful. There is so much poverty in the peninsula at present. Prices are very high even for simple necessities like salt and flour. It was a useless war, Madge. No good purpose could possibly have been served by such a conflict, and many families were close to starvation before the peace was signed. It will take years for them, indeed for everyone, to reach the level of prosperity that was enjoyed prior to the fighting, and if the Yankees should invade our borders a second time . . ."

"It will not happen again," Madge interrupted. "Richard and his closest friends were convinced that there will be no more war between our two countries. Al-

though he was a strong Loyalist, just as James and my other brothers are, he was able to see how much we and the people of the United States need each other's friendship. So many of our families have intermarried and moved back and forth across the border since the Loyalists first came to Upper Canada that we are, in reality, all a part of one family. We who are faithful to our allegiance to England need not deny that loyalty in order to show friendship to the Yankees. The war has, I think, proved to them that we prefer to live under British rule. But we need so much of what the Americans can offer us in addition to their friendship, and the Yankees need our friendship and goodwill as much as we need theirs. We would do well, I think, to emulate their industrial skills. Also it will be years before Upper Canada can hope to attain the standard of learning provided in the established American colleges, although I understand that the Legislature at York has recently appropriated some six thousand pounds a year for the support of our common schools. Richard and I had a long conversation about this subject the day before he went to Montreal for the last time. No, Laura, I'm convinced, as he was, that there will be no more war between the countries. There is prejudice in the hearts of many on both sides of the border, I know, but in time it will disappear."

"It is impossible not to be prejudiced. The people in the Niagara peninsula have suffered so much because of the war," Laura protested.

"Perhaps those who are able to see the distant view will be required to help the others forgive and forget. It ill behooves you to be intolerant, Laura. The Loyalists made your father welcome when he came to Upper Canada although he fought against them in the War of Independence. Can you not be as forgiving as they?"

Laura stared at her sister-in-law in surprise. "You astonish me, Madge. I would have thought you and Richard were as ardent Loyalists as any who live in Upper Canada."

"Indeed I am, and because this is the country to which the Loyalists came I want the best for it; more settlers to develop farm lands, more opportunities for

growth and expansion, better transportation, a sufficient number of schools so that every child may be educated. If we hold to ourselves, refuse to reach out in friendship to our neighbours and trade with them, prosperity may well be impossible for us to attain. Although the war seemed a useless one, as you say, Richard maintained that we in Upper Canada have emerged from it with a feeling of confidence in ourselves and our country that we did not possess heretofore. By our conduct of the war we have earned the respect of the neighbours who were our enemy for a time and that, he said, was an excellent beginning for a lasting peace."

Laura's respect for the opinions of her late brother-in-law caused her to ponder thoughtfully over the conversation with Madge. If the peace were to be lasting there must indeed be a bond of sincere friendship between the people of both countries. A token peace would not be enough. She would have liked to talk with James about her conversation with her sister-in-law had she been able to do so quietly and rationally. Like so many of the inhabitants of the Niagara peninsula, however, James had come to resent the Yankees with a passion that made her uneasy. Richard's convictions, as expressed by Madge, would irritate him. Instead, she talked with her half brother Charles, and was amazed to hear him voice a belief similar to that expressed by Madge.

There must never again be a war between Upper Canada and the United States, he insisted. It would be suicidal for either side to harbour a grudge against the other when each had so much to offer a friendly neighbour. He was certain the Yankees were, on the whole, an amiable people who desired to live in peace. His friend Will Merritt and he were in the process of forming a company that would be engaged in building a canal from the mouth of Twelve Mile Creek to the junction of the Chippawa and Niagara rivers, at Chippawa, for easier transportation of merchandise from the port of Queenston to points along Lake Erie. A large sum of money would be required to finance the project, more than could be raised in Canada, funds which Will was presently endeavour-

ing to obtain in the city of New York. He did not think American bankers would be willing to lend money for such a scheme unless they felt confident that those people who would profit by it shared their desire for mutual benefit and goodwill. With the advent of steamboat service on Lake Ontario which, he understood, was promised before the shipping season ended, there would be more openings for travel between the respective countries and better communication. The people of Upper Canada would be unwise, he thought, to allow themselves to be deterred by prejudice from the benefits that could be derived through these opportunities.

The return of Madge Cartwright signalled resumption of those afternoon gatherings that had been popular with the ladies prior to the war. Perhaps the tea refreshments were less lavish because flour had been in short supply and consequently prohibitively high in price; perhaps the women's gowns were faded, threadbare, and no longer fashionable. These small details seemed to matter not at all. The tea was still hot and strong; conversation still flowed freely; and the friendly concern of each for the welfare of the others was even more evident than it had been in those earlier days. Those women who had worked with Mary Dexter during the war to provide socks and clothing for the militiamen gathered again to knit and sew warm garments for the children of many needy parents.

Toward the end of summer Mrs. Shipman returned to Queenston to see for herself how Mary Dexter's family had adjusted to their new parents. She expressed satisfaction with what she saw. "The hand of the good Lord must have guided me that day I thought to bring them to Mary. They're a perfect family for her, Mrs. Secord," she said as she sat on Laura's porch, sipping tea with her and Mistress Sally.

Laura agreed. "We love them," she said. "They are very gentle children. I think Jamie is my favourite because he is such an affectionate little boy. He and Peter often spend an entire day with Charles and Appy. The

four seem to like to play together.”

Mrs. Shipman had brought with her a young girl who would, she said, release Charlotte from her duties; she would work for her keep, give the children meals, and help Mary about the house. In praise of Charlotte, she said, “Your daughter has a special way with children, Mrs. Secord, a talent for making little ones comfortable and happy, yet obedient. Mary will miss her, but I’m sure you will be glad to have her at home again. It was kind, indeed, of you to allow her to stay with my niece during these first weeks.”

Immediately following her son’s marriage to Anna Merritt, Mistress Sally decided to return to her home at Port Credit. She had been absent far too long, she declared. No amount of urging could persuade her to extend her visit, and when she went, a passenger to York on the new steamship *Frontenac*, Charlotte accompanied her. With Harriet and Hannah growing up so quickly, Laura could spare Charlotte for a few more weeks, Mistress Sally insisted. The change would be good for her, and when she tired of her visit at Port Credit her grandmother would send her to York to David and Elizabeth Pickett who would see that she was returned to Queenston in safety.

Charlotte’s eyes sparkled with excitement when Mistress Sally broached the subject. To travel to York would be a thrilling experience, she exclaimed, and, when her parents gave their consent, began to gather her clothes for the journey.

“Fan says maybe Charlotte will catch a husband while she is away,” Harriet speculated as the family sat at the dinner table on the day following Mistress Sally’s departure. “Do you think she may, Mama?”

“Hush, you’re talking nonsense,” Laura said sharply. “Charlotte is too young to think of marriage.”

“Perhaps not too young, but certainly too shy,” James corrected her. “She is a quiet little mouse, just as you were, my dear. I doubt that she will marry for a few years at least.”

When dinner was over and the children had gone upstairs with Harriet, James placed an arm about Laura’s

shoulders and said, "I've some good news for you, Lolly. I've been able to engage an assistant who will relieve me in the shop. No longer will you need to stand behind the counter and spell me when I become tired. This young man is strong and seems willing to do anything I ask. The future looks bright to me at the moment. Merchandise is coming in by ship now, and Robert Hamilton tells me that the Montreal firm through whom I formerly ordered materials from England has begun to import fine wool and yard goods again. I've made a few pounds outside the shop in these last weeks by buying and selling the Williamson property. If I let it be known that I am prepared to bargain and trade in land I shall, no doubt, have an opportunity to conduct other similar transactions. Robert and I are agreed that there may be quite a profitable business in land as time goes by, particularly since the British government hopes to encourage more immigration to Upper Canada from England as well as Scotland and Ireland. The King must do something to offset the ban he has declared on the migration of settlers from the United States to Canada."

James continued to buy and sell farm land whenever an opportunity presented itself, and as the value of property rose, sometimes realized quite substantial amounts on the transactions. His activity in real estate made it necessary for him to drive into the country to view properties offered for sale, and although Bob accompanied him, the hours of rigid immobility in the carriage took their toll of his injured leg and the pains of rheumatism began to plague him. In spite of the fact that his circumstances had improved considerably, his resentment toward the Yankees continued and he blamed them for his inability to be as active as other men.

"You harbour too much prejudice," his brother David told him. "Let the past be forgotten now. Surely you've faced the fact that Upper Canada will never be a province of great importance if there is a barrier instead of a border between us and the United States. Trade with England alone is not enough. If there is ever to be real growth and expansion here we shall need the goods, commodities, and services the United States can offer us."

They sat beside the fire in the parlour of David's new house near St. David's – Laura, James, and David. Polly, in the last stages of pregnancy, lay on a sofa, snuggled in a blanket of soft rose wool. Outside, snow had begun to fall in thick, swirling flakes. Now and then the fire sputtered and tongues of flame darted toward the chimney as the wind began to rise. Concerned about her condition, Polly got up from the couch, moved heavily toward the window, and scraped the frost patterns away to peer out at the thickening storm. "The midwife was to have come tomorrow. I hope I shall have no need of her in the meantime," she said.

Laura drew her shawl more closely round her shoulders and went to stand beside her sister-in-law. "You mustn't worry, Polly. I shan't leave you until the midwife comes. Unless the storm slackens soon James and I will be forced to spend the night here in any event."

Polly's child was born at midnight, with great difficulty, and without the assistance of the midwife. When the storm abated Laura and James returned to Queenston. Two days later, Laura opened the door to David Secord's insistent knock. Her usually calm brother-in-law seemed more distraught than she had ever seen him. "What is it, David? Is anything wrong? Come in and sit by the fire while I make you a hot toddy," she said.

He covered his face with his hands as he blurted out the words, "The baby is dead. Polly's baby is dead. Can you come with me?"

"Oh no! I thought she seemed to be such a healthy infant. What could have happened?"

"The servant, Jenny, was caring for her while Polly rested, and because the bedroom was cold she sat close to the fire with the child's body partially uncovered to warm it. The poor woman was tired and fell asleep while the baby's legs were exposed to the heat. When Polly wakened the infant was screaming, and although she managed to crawl from her bed and waken the woman the baby was already so badly burned that she died during the night. I suppose I should be angry with old Jenny, but I can't find it in my heart to upbraid her. She had been overworked, and when she sat down the warmth of

the fire made her drowsy. The poor woman is more distraught than Polly. She blames herself, of course, although it was obviously an unavoidable accident, caused indirectly by the storm. The midwife didn't arrive because of the heavy snowfall, as you know. Had she done so, Jenny would have been able to rest after you and James left. Perhaps I should not have left her alone with Polly, although I was absent only long enough to fetch a neighbour who had offered to look after the child until Polly should become strong again."

Laura placed a sympathetic hand on David's arm. "Poor Polly," she said. "I'm so very, very sorry."

Chapter 27

Appy

On a morning in late June Laura knelt among the shrubs that bordered her flower garden, tying lush peony branches to the stakes she had hammered into the ground. The crimson buds, heavily swollen, had begun to break through their outer calyxes and she touched them with caressing fingers as she fastened sturdy twine round the stalks. The sun was warm on her shoulders, and she pushed a bonnet back from her forehead to wipe the moisture away. Over by the stables Charles and Appy were engaged in an enthusiastic game of hide and seek with Mary Dexter's boys. She smiled as she listened to their shrieks of laughter and Appy's squeals of delight, pleased that her daughter was in a happy mood.

Under the mulberry tree James sat dozing in his chair. She observed the relaxed position of his body, legs stretched before him, face turned to the sun, and reflected that in recent weeks he seemed happier, less tense than heretofore. He had, she realized, absented himself from his shop more and more often of late to become involved in a number of land transactions and she wondered if an improved financial situation was the reason for his more mellow disposition. He had come to the garden this morning to wait until Bob could drive him to the country where a homestead was to be sold, he had said, because the unfortunate man who occupied it for

the past year was unable to eke out a living on it. The man did not like the life in Upper Canada and intended to move his family across the border to a place where he might find employment that would be more to his taste. Like many of the new immigrants who were coming to Upper Canada from England and Scotland, he had grown up in an urban environment, and consequently was easily discouraged by the primitive living conditions and lack of opportunities for work other than on the land. Since the property must be sold James had felt it was a chance for him to make a few extra pounds through the purchase and sale of it. Would he be able to sell it quickly, and at a profit, she wondered as she rose from her kneeling position, brushing the soft earth from her fingers.

Suddenly her attention was caught by a change in the sounds of the children's voices. They had disappeared from view. Before she quite realized that Appy was screaming hysterically and that there was a note of terror in Charles's repeated shouts of "Mama, Mama," she was running toward the barn, skirts held high above her ankles.

Jamie Dexter came round the building, as she approached it, followed by Peter, crying, "Aunt Laura, Aunt Laura, there are rattlesnakes in the cotton sedge. We think Appy stepped on one."

"Fetch the hoe from the garden, quickly, and waken your Uncle James," she directed, and ran on.

Charles and Appy had become silent, and as she neared them she could see that they were staring at the stand of cotton sedge as if hypnotized. When she noticed the snakes, partially hidden by the white-topped grass, one with head half-raised, one coiling its slithering body for attack, she stopped, unsure what to do. Charles turned anxious eyes toward her, placed a finger to his lips in a gesture of silence. She nodded her approval, glad that in spite of his fear he had remembered his father's admonition to remain perfectly still when he heard the warning rattle of a snake. Would the rule serve in this instance when the reptiles were roused to anger? And if Peter and Jamie returned, shouting as

they approached, what would happen? Would she dare risk using the hoe to beat the snakes off? While she stood there, unable to decide what to do, James limped toward her, cane in one hand, garden hoe in the other. At the same instant, Bob emerged from the barn with a large piece of rock in his hand. The snakes, sensing the arrival of a new enemy, hissed angrily, tongues darting swiftly from open jaws as beady eyes searched for their victim. Suddenly, James thrust the hoe toward her, and with one swift movement snatched Appy into his arms and shouted, "Run Charlie," as the snakes moved to strike and Bob hurled his rock toward them with unerring aim.

Appy's slender body was limp, her eyes closed, as James eased her over his shoulder and began to make his way toward the house. "Go quickly, Lolly, and see if Fan has a fire burning in the kitchen stove and boiling water in the kettle," he said. "Fetch my sharp-edged knife from the chest in our bedroom. If the snake has bitten Appy I shall have to cut away the poisoned flesh immediately, and suck the wound. We dare not wait for Dr. Spencely."

"Oh, no, James! Oh, my poor Appy," she gasped, and with one hand grasping that of Charles ran swiftly toward the kitchen.

The long pine table that stood beside the window had been cleared and scrubbed clean when James lowered his daughter on to it. With fumbling, uncertain fingers Laura undid the high-buttoned shoes, tore off the blue stockings, and with James hovering over her examined Appy's feet for the tell-tale red marks of the snake's venom fang. "I can find no trace of a bite," she said.

James thrust her aside, scrutinized Appy's legs carefully. "There is no swelling," he said, and bent to pick up her shoes. "Do you see this, Laura? These marks were made by the snake," he said, pointing to infinitesimal dots on the black leather. "Thank God the shoes protected her."

"If she was not bitten, why is she so still? We must be very sure that she hasn't been harmed, James."

"I'm quite certain, Lolly. Fear may have caused her to faint." James sprinkled drops of water on the girl's

white face as he spoke. When her eyelids began to flutter he said, "Sit with her a little while, Lolly, until she forgets about the snakes."

The encounter with the rattlesnakes seemed to mark the beginning of Appy's illness. Always shy, timid, often moody, she now refused to leave the shelter of the house unless accompanied by one or the other of her parents. While the other children romped, played, or studied their lessons, she lay on the sofa in the library, suffering from a headache, often imagined, or a cold or fever. Before the onset of winter she had begun to develop a dry, racking cough that was aggravated by attacks of croup that left her weak and choking for breath. Dr. Spencely, summoned hastily in the night during a particularly severe spasm of coughing, looked grave as he made his examination. "I'm afraid she has a tendency toward consumption," he said, his eyes avoiding Laura's. "With care she may live for several years, but it is unlikely that she will ever be strong."

Spring had come early to the peninsula the year that Appy died, and the first wildflowers were in bloom beside the porch. While she lay in her coffin, awaiting the day of burial, a nosegay of the blossoms, freshly gathered each morning by Fan, rested beneath her chin. Friends and neighbours who came to offer their sympathy, and returned to sit up with the dead girl during the long nights of the wake, brought food and drink to sustain them through their grim vigil.

It seemed to Laura that the hush of death enveloped the entire house as she went about the task of preparing for the funeral. Dry-eyed, her face pale and drawn, she cut and basted her own mourning gown of black bombazine, dresses of cotton challis in the same sombre colour for her daughters and Fan, while her sister-in-law, Anna Ingersoll, sewed them with meticulous stitches. The customary black bands were applied to James's coat sleeve and that of their son Charles. Not until the night before the day of burial, when she gained the privacy of her own room long after midnight to lie in the fourposter bed with her husband's arms close about her, was she able to weep.

"Don't grieve so, Lolly. You will make yourself ill," James said, and stroked her hair while the tears streamed down her cheeks.

When she could control her voice she said, "Let me cry, James. There is relief in tears. So many times since Appy was born I've asked myself how it is possible to have six healthy children, and the seventh a frail child of strange moods. From the beginning she seemed to require more of my attention than I gave to the older ones. Perhaps it was her very dependence that made me love her so much. To lose one's child is a cruel blow to a mother, but if she couldn't be well and strong like the others, if she were always nervous and fearful, never really happy, I think I can be reconciled to her death."

Appy was buried on the sixth day after her death. Early in the morning Laura and James entered the library and dismissed Mary and Robert Dexter and those other friends who had kept watch through the night over the still figure in the pine box. While they stood side by side, with James's protecting arm about Laura's shoulders, the door was opened and Fan tiptoed softly across the carpet to place a last fresh nosegay on Appy's breast. "Beg pardon," she sobbed when she saw them. "I just wanted her to have a few flowers."

Laura reached out a hand to pat her shoulder. "You loved her very much, didn't you, Fan?"

"Oh, yes, Ma'am, she always needed much more loving than the others, and these last years she was so shy, so fearful."

Her words ended in a wail, and James said sternly, "Come now, Fan, there are a great many things to be done. Dry your tears. Your mistress will need all the assistance you can give her."

"Yes, sir, I know. I've got to lay the dining room table for the ladies and gentlemen who'll be coming back from the burying grounds. The food is ready. There is a ham roasting in the oven. Such quantities of cakes and pies the neighbours have sent! Don't you worry, sir. The girls' black dresses are laid out on their beds, and I'll see that Master Charlie's suit is brushed. Bob and I will be certain that everything is looked after."

When their friends had gathered for the funeral service and the clergyman stood ready to deliver his message of comfort, Jamie Dexter left his father's side and found a seat beside Laura, placing a reassuring hand on her knee. "I'm so sorry about Appy," he whispered, as he struggled to control his voice.

Laura kissed his anxious face, placed her hand over his, kept him close to her throughout the service, and on the way to the cemetery he sat quietly beside her in the carriage. His youthful hand, grasping hers tightly, was strangely comforting.

Chapter 28

Lean Years

James Secord found, as time went by, that the drive to and from his house to the wharf each day, the long hours in his shop, and the task of balancing accounts exhausted him. Twinges of rheumatism in his injured leg and thigh had become more pronounced, causing him considerable discomfort, and when his assistant offered to purchase the business he decided to accept the man's proposal.

While Laura questioned the wisdom of his decision because the shop had been a prosperous venture in the years prior to the war, James insisted that his sale of a certain property had netted him a considerable profit. A number of similar transactions were pending, and he felt certain that with the addition of the pension he now received in compensation for his war injury they would manage very well. Their family was smaller, he said, since Mary had gone to Jamaica and Charlotte was with her grandmother. He spoke of sending Charles to a good boarding school in the autumn, and had written to Madge to inquire about the merits of the Royal Grammar School at Kingston.

With the return to the peninsula of a degree of prosperity a new and lively social life stirred the area. There were successive dancing and skating parties and sleigh rides to which Harriet received invitations. For Harriet's

first ball Laura fashioned a gown of lustrous white silk, and provided long gloves and slippers to match. When her father observed her, dressed for the party, he declared that she was the prettiest of all his daughters.

Harriet's eyes had sparkled in anticipation of the pleasures of the evening as Laura helped her into the gown and laced her stays more tightly to enhance the smallness of her waist, while Hannah, her younger sister, looked on with admiring eyes. "Mama, will you make me a gown like Harriet's?" she asked.

Turning to place a kiss on the young girl's forehead, her mother smiled. "When the invitations begin to arrive for Miss Hannah Secord I'll see that she has an appropriate frock."

The following summer Charlotte returned to Queenston with her grandmother. They had been to Lebanon County, New York, to visit Laura's sister Mira, who with her family had moved there from Ingersoll. After leaving Mira's house they had gone to Great Barrington, Massachusetts, so that Mistress Sally might visit a friend, and while there had taken tea with the wife of the present owner of the former Ingersoll home. "You must have felt very badly at having to leave it, Mama, it is such a pretty place, although my grandmother thinks the furnishings are in less good taste now than in her day, and the flower garden is a sorry picture of neglect," Charlotte said.

Mistress Sally announced that she had given up her home at Port Credit and when her visit to Laura terminated she would go to Ingersoll. A year or two earlier, her son Charles had repurchased the tract of land along the Thames River on which his father originally settled, built a fine new home on the property, and refurbished the original log house for his mother's use. Having recently established his family at Ingersoll, he urged his mother to take up residence there. Mistress Sally, who had found her granddaughter a most satisfactory companion during the months spent with her, begged Laura and James to allow Charlotte to accompany her to Ingersoll when she went.

Upon her arrival at Queenston, Mistress Sally said

she was expecting a visit from her girlhood friend, Harriet Smith, of New York. Uncertain where she would be situated when her friend arrived, she had suggested that Mrs. Smith come to the Secords at Queenston. "No doubt Harriet will wish to accompany me to Ingersoll, and if I may have Charlotte to help me I shall be glad to entertain her. If not, perhaps I shall remain here until she leaves," she said.

Laura nodded in agreement. "I remember Father told us about the kindness shown him by Mr. and Mrs. Smith when he had occasion to travel to New York while we were living at Great Barrington. For his sake I should like to return the favour when your friend arrives. Will her husband come with her?" she asked, her thoughts busy with the housekeeping arrangements that would have to be resolved before Mrs. Smith arrived.

"Ebenezer Smith passed away two years ago. Whether her son David will accompany her I know not. He was studying law when his father died, but must, I think, have finished in the meantime."

At the end of August Harriet Smith and her son came from Oswego by steamship, and after a brief visit at Queenston travelled to Ingersoll with Mistress Sally and Charlotte. Laura and James stood at the gate with their children to wave goodbye to the guests on the morning of their departure. Harriet Secord's tone was wistful as she extolled the merits of the young man, David. "Did you notice his eyes, Mama, such a deep blue, and his hair so fair he looks like a young god! His manners are polished, his speech most dignified. He's unlike any of the young men I know. I wish Grandmother Ingersoll had invited me to stay with her."

Laura smiled in amusement. "Hush," she cautioned, "you mustn't say such things. Our friends would think you bold and forward."

"The young man appears to be well-read, intelligent, and as Mistress Sally reminded me, he comes of a very good family. However, if he is seeking to become established in Upper Canada, as I believe he means to do, the latter qualification will matter less here than it might in the city of New York," James said.

When David Smith returned to the Niagara peninsula to establish a law practice at St. Catharines he was often a Sunday guest at the Secord house, and from the time of his first visit the reserved young man found Harriet an absorbingly satisfying companion. Neither James nor Laura expressed surprise when David announced that he and Harriet were in love.

After the wedding festivities were over and Harriet had gone to her new home at St. Catharines, riding proudly in the carriage beside David, James rested his arm on Laura's shoulders, placed a kiss behind her ear, and said, "I'm afraid we're growing old, my dear. Two of our daughters are already married, and that young Englishman, Mr. Hawley Williams, who is David's friend, seems to have eyes for no one but Hannah when she is present. I hope our girls and their husbands will experience as much happiness as you and I have had, Lolly."

She smiled and ran her fingers through his hair as she said, "If their love for each other is as strong and abiding as ours has been we need have no fear for their future. In spite of the war the years have been good ones for us James, although I must confess I wish we knew more about William and Mary's situation. It is so long since we have heard from them. Apart from the fact that they have two little girls we really know nothing about their circumstances. I long to see my grandchildren, James, hold them in my arms, and tell them a foolish bedtime story. So many years have passed since we saw Mary I find myself wondering how she looks, and whether I shall know her if I ever see her again. Should William not have earned a leave of absence from his post?"

"You are forgetting that William and Mary went to Ireland to see his parents on his last leave, and that they couldn't come to us the previous time because of the birth of their first child. I should think they will be coming home to us within the next year or two."

Laura and James waited month after month for letters from Jamaica which never came. "Perhaps they intend to surprise us," James said, hopefully. "They may arrive here at any time."

"No, dear, Mary would have written to tell us if they planned to come. Something is wrong. I feel it. Is it possible to make inquiries from someone, James? I would give a good deal to know they are safe and well."

"Let us wait another month or two, Lolly. It is possible their letters may have been lost. Have patience, my dear, and try not to fret."

Laura was almost convinced that she would not see her daughter again when, without warning, Mary came home. Attired in deep mourning, a veil shielding her face, two little girls clutching at her skirts, she came up the path from the gate. At the sitting room window, Laura watched her, curiously, until a sudden premonition of the truth urged her forward to meet the visitor. When Mary saw her she grasped a hand of each child and ran into her mother's arms. "William is dead," she said in answer to the unspoken question in Laura's eyes.

Unable to think of comforting words, Laura held her close until the small girls tugged at her skirts to gain attention, and Fan came to speak to her mistress. Sensing that Mary was close to a state of collapse, Laura directed Fan to take the children to the kitchen and give them bowls of bread and milk. With an arm about her waist, she helped Mary up the stairs to her old room. "Lie down here, darling," she said, and removed the counterpane from the bed. "I'll fetch you some tea and tell your father that you've come home. Tomorrow will be time enough for you to talk with the others."

William had died of a sudden, strange fever. Grief-stricken, Mary had seen him buried in the Anglican cemetery at Kingston, in Jamaica, and then brought her children home to Queenston alone. "May we stay a little while, Mother?" she asked. "If I could have a few months here with you and Papa before I take the girls to Ireland, time enough to become used to the thought of being a widow, I think my mind would be more at ease. I could view the future more calmly. Oh, Mama, what am I to do? I loved William so much. Never in all the time we were together did I think he would sicken and die. He was so strong, so thoughtful and kind. He took such good care of us. When he knew that he couldn't get well he

made me promise to take the girls to his parents. I shall have to keep that promise, Mother. William was very insistent that they be brought up in Ireland."

Mary's unhappy homecoming brought both sadness and joy to her parents. Her obvious anguish twisted their heartstrings, while delight in the knowledge that their daughter and grandchildren were safe beneath their roof surged above the grief they felt. The older child, Mary, reminded Laura of Appy, so like her was she in appearance, although she admitted that the similarity ended there. Mary was a placid girl who loved everyone, while her younger sister Elizabeth flew into rages when thwarted and bestowed smiles and loving kisses on the friends who humoured her. She was very like her father, Laura thought, remembering William's red hair, his quick temper, and engaging grin. Elizabeth was her grandfather's favourite.

Hannah, as James had predicted, married David Smith's friend, Hawley Williams, and the first months of their marriage were spent with the Secords. When they moved to the hamlet of Guelph to settle on a farm, Hannah, pregnant and unwell, insisted that Charlotte must be sent for. She would need her sister with her until after the confinement, she said. "Grandmother Ingersoll has no right to monopolize Charlotte as she does. It is extremely selfish of her. How is my sister to get a husband if she has no friends of her own age? When she comes to us perhaps we may find a suitable man for her."

"Hush, dear," her mother scolded. "You know quite well that your grandmother is far from selfish. Charlotte lives with her because she chooses to do so. If you can persuade her to visit you for the next few months I shall feel less worried about you than I would if you are alone, but I must advise you to put any thought of finding a husband for her from your mind. Marriage doesn't seem to have the same attraction for your sister that it has for you."

"Mama, is it true that Charlotte was in love with the young lieutenant who stood up with William when he and Mary were married? She used to be cross with us if Harriet or I teased her about him. Is that the reason you

say marriage has no attraction for her?"

"I don't know, Hannah. Charlotte has not said anything that would lead me to believe that she was particularly interested in the young man, although I observed at the time that she seemed to enjoy his company. They were paired together often when our friends gave parties for Mary and her William. You will remember that he went to Jamaica with them and died of cholera within a few months of his arrival there. Charlotte has never been communicative about her feelings. Whether she was in love with the young man or not I can't say, but I believe she is quite content to remain a spinster in spite of your sisterly concern for her unmarried state."

Influenced by a letter from Hannah, Charlotte said goodbye to her grandmother, and set out for Guelph in the care of her Uncle Charles. When Mistress Sally learned that her son meant to go on to Queenston before returning to Ingersoll she wrote to ask the youngest Secord daughter to visit her during Charlotte's absence.

Young Laura had begun to assist her father with his business. The once substantial profits derived from his land sales were dwindling for lack of ready funds with which to complete transactions, and when it was impossible for Bob to drive him she accompanied James on expeditions into the country in an endeavour to collect monies owed him. At home, she pored over his accounts, made records of the names of purchasers of land, and the amounts owing on each property in an effort to determine how her father's diminishing financial resources could be retrieved. Although James held mortgages on a number of farms, the men to whom he had sold the land were, in spite of good intentions, often unable to pay more than a token interest on the investment. It was an unhappy situation from which there seemed to be no immediate respite, and after a time James was forced to discontinue his real estate business. When those men who owed him money for their farms were able to pay he felt certain they would do so. He could not, he said, press them for funds they did not have. When he was reduced, eventually, to living entirely on his pension he began to cast about for other means of augmenting a too-slender

income until such time as his financial position improved.

Although young Laura declared that she could not desert her father at a time when he was so distressed her mother begged, and James insisted, that she accept Mistress Sally's invitation.

"Your grandmother likes to have young people about her. It will please her very much, I know, to have you accept her invitation," Laura said. "Your Uncle Charles is at Chippawa where he has some business to transact, and will stay overnight with us before he returns to Ingersoll. He will be glad to see that you reach your grandmother safely."

As time went by letters from William's parents urged Mary to go to Ireland without further delay, and when she announced her intention of leaving Queenston in the spring James refused to allow her to travel unaccompanied. Charlotte must go with her, he said. She had earned a holiday, and he was certain Hannah would manage quite well without her sister. She must come back from Guelph immediately to make ready for the journey. The sisters would enjoy each other's company during the voyage, and the experience of travelling to a distant country would be a broadening one for Charlotte.

"Can you afford to send Charlotte to Ireland?" Laura asked. "Will the cost of her passage on the ship not be beyond yours means?"

"I'm afraid so, Lolly, but I'm determined that she must go. The Trumbulls would deem it odd, indeed, if we permitted their son's widow to travel unaccompanied. I shall find someone to loan me the money against the mortgages I hold."

During the winter Laura and her daughters cut and sewed new materials into gowns, capes, and skirts for the journey, and knit gloves and stockings for Mary's children. While she fashioned soft wools and stiffened silks into garments she hoped would be fashionable in Ireland, Laura's heart was often heavy. No mention had been made in any of their conversations of the length of Mary's sojourn in Ireland, or whether she would return. Instinctively, Laura knew that when she bade her

daughter goodbye it would be for the last time. Charlotte might come back to Queenston but Mary would not. When she reached Ireland William's considerable estate would be hers, and she would have a substantial pension from the British government. She would be expected to take her place among William's family as a daughter of the house. Her children would have a governess to instruct them in French, music, drawing. They would learn to ride and each would have her own horse. Unless there could be a continuous flow of communication between them they would, as the months passed, gradually forget their grandparents in Upper Canada and the house that had sheltered them for a time.

When their trunks and boxes were packed, and they were ready to take their departure, James held Mary close in his arms. "Thank you, my dear, for giving us these months with our grandchildren. You and Charlotte must take good care of them and of each other. Your mother and I will be very lonely when you've gone," he said.

There were sudden tears in Laura's eyes as she listened to James's remark and heard the tone of sadness in his voice, and when she kissed her daughter goodbye she pleaded, "Let us hear from you often, Mary. Your father and I will want to know all about your new life in Ireland. Talk to your girls about us and about Upper Canada and teach them to write long letters to us. Don't let them forget us."

Chapter 29

Removal to Chippawa

In spite of difficulties encountered during its construction the canal which had been the fond dream of William Hamilton Merritt and Charles Ingersoll was eventually completed. In 1829 the first schooners passed through the Merritt Canal from Twelve Mile Creek on Lake Ontario to Chippawa at the junction of the Chippawa and Niagara rivers. For thirty years or more cargo ships had been unloaded at Queenston, and merchandise destined for points along the shore of Lake Erie was transported by horse-drawn vehicles over the portage road to Chippawa in order to avoid the non-navigable rapids in the Niagara River. Now, teams of twelve and sixteen oxen, moving along the road adjacent to the canal, pulled the schooners through the thirty locks into safe water.

With the advent of the canal's completion to Chippawa that community became an important shipping centre. An office for the collection of His Majesty's customs was established there, and at the suggestion of his brother-in-law, Charles Ingersoll, James Secord made application for the position of customs collector. His war record was duly set out in the application papers, and the facts of Laura's journey to Beaver Dams were noted. In order that there should be no doubt of the authenticity of her story Laura wrote to James Fitzgibbon, now risen to

the rank of colonel and stationed at York, to ask for a letter of verification. Colonel Fitzgibbon's reply, which recorded the incident and described her arrival at the Decew house, was included with the papers. For months following the submission of his application James awaited word from the office of the lieutenant-governor, while the position remained unfilled.

In the meantime, Charlotte, Mary and her children departed for Ireland, and young Laura wrote that a Dr. William Clark was paying her considerable attention; he was a special friend of her Uncle Charles and a favourite with Mistress Sally. Her latest letter described the life at Ingersoll as most agreeable and exciting. Unless her father required further assistance with the collection of his accounts she would like to remain with her grandmother until the spring.

There was a wry smile on James's face as Laura finished reading the letter aloud, and she was quick to detect the note of desperation in his voice as he said, "I'm relieved to learn that she has made friends and is happy. I know you miss her, sorely, as I do, but I must confess it would be almost impossible just now for me to give young Laura the gowns and entertainments we provided so easily for Harriet when she began to accept invitations to social functions. Do you not agree that we should encourage her to remain at Ingersoll for the present since she seems to be quite happy there. You must write to your mother and inquire about this Dr. Clark. If she approves of him, if he is a friend of Charles, I should think he may be a very acceptable companion for our daughter."

Laura and James had come out to the uncovered porch to rest at the end of a stifling August day. They were alone now in the house they had occupied since the turn of the century. Although the furnishings had taken on a well-worn appearance and the window curtains were faded by many launderings, the exterior of the building, freshly painted each year by Bob, gleamed white in the late sunshine. Absent-mindedly, Laura brushed a fly from the empty chair beside her, thinking that the house which for so many years had rung with

the sounds of children's merriment and was filled to capacity many times with visitors, was more often than not quiet now.

Those friends who rallied round them to offer sympathy or assistance at the time of Madge Cartwright's death came to the house less regularly. Certain of their associates had passed away, others moved to York, Kingston, or across the border, and without her sister-in-law's forceful presence their former custom of gathering at her house or Laura's in the afternoon or evening was abandoned for a time. There were many newcomers at Queenston now and, although Laura did not doubt the desirability of their friendship, she had lost the incentive to integrate them into what remained of her original circle of friends.

A year later, when Robert Dexter, at James's suggestion, acquired the Cartwright home, Mary began to follow the pattern originally set by its former mistress. Again, the ladies of Queenston gathered around the hour of two to sew, knit, drink tea, and spend an afternoon in pleasant conversation at 'the old Cartwright place', as it continued to be known. Sometimes Laura joined them. More often she preferred to visit her friend at a time that she was alone.

The truth of the matter was that James's business difficulties worried her increasingly, to the point that she found it impossible to thrust her cares aside even for an hour. She was aware that he was regarded by many who knew him as a prosperous businessman, although in reality his income was pitifully meagre, and she had grave doubts that his financial position would improve. She might have discussed the matter with Charles or with David Secord, had family pride not forbidden such indiscretion. Instead, she scrimped and saved as much as possible on food, clothing, and household furnishings, and when Fan died suddenly of pneumonia Laura decided not to engage another servant.

James's eventual appointment to the office of collector of His Majesty's customs posed new problems for Laura. He was required to take up his duties at Chippawa immediately, and since the distance from Queenston was

too great to permit him to drive back and forth each day it was necessary to find lodgings until a suitable house could be acquired. His disability made it imperative that Bob accompany him, and shelter must be arranged for him as well. In the meantime Laura began to think of the preparations she must make before their household effects could be moved to Chippawa, while she reluctantly faced the fact that the Queenston property would have to be sold. Concerned that Laura must remain at Queenston until the house was disposed of, James insisted that she send for young Laura at once. "I shall be uneasy if I think you are alone at night, Lolly. Until young Laura comes you must ask someone from the village to stay with you."

Laura was reluctant to ask her daughter to return from Ingersoll. If she could accompany James to Chippawa and stay at his lodgings until they were able to find a house on which they could make a small payment, she could then return to Queenston and ask Mary Dexter and her daughter Ellen to assist in dismantling the house. In order to relieve James's mind she would persuade Ellen to be her guest. Mary's daughter was seventeen now. She would be a lively companion, and her friends would fill the silent rooms with gaiety and laughter until the property could be disposed of.

"Let us find a small house at Chippawa," she said. "Our children are scattered. We shall never have them all under our roof at one time again. A cottage, with trees to shelter it, a flower garden, space for vegetables beside the kitchen door, and a cabin for Bob will be adequate for us."

Upon receipt of a letter from their son Charles, disposal of the Queenston property became unnecessary. He wrote from the city of New York to say that he had finished his studies in law and intended to return to Queenston and establish a practice there. He had fallen in love with a Miss Margaret Robins, and when he came home she would accompany him as his bride. He would, as soon as possible, look about for a house large enough to provide space for his law office, and hoped in the meantime to stay with his parents.



Chippawa, home of Mrs. Secord, and where she died.

James who, as his financial resources dwindled, had been hard pressed to find the funds to maintain his son at school, sighed in relief as he read the letter. Perhaps he could begin now to take care of certain minor debts. Although small amounts of interest were occasionally paid on the mortgages he held, he had regained only a very meagre portion of the principal invested. He speculated, briefly, about the financial standing of the bride-to-be's father, and whether Margaret Robins could bring to the marriage a sufficient sum of money to maintain the couple until Charles became firmly established as an attorney at law.

"I wish we could give this house to Charles and his wife," Laura said, when James read the letter to her. "I should not feel so desolate if one of our family were to continue to live in it; if I could return here as often as I wish, walk through the rooms, remember the days when the children were young, the happy incidents that occurred, and the sad ones. It is so much a part of me, of you, James, and our family, it distresses me to think of selling it."

"Charles is our only son." James spoke slowly. "I like your suggestion Lolly. Do you think the house would be an appropriate wedding gift for Charles and his bride? If so, I shall write to him at once."

Before a letter could be dispatched to New York Charles and his wife arrived at Queenston. Laura was alone when they came. Seated on the stoop, she watched, curiously, as the driver of the hired carriage pulled his horses to a stop before the steps. When she recognized Charles and saw him lift the slender young girl beside him to the ground, sudden tears sprang to her eyes and she hurried to greet them. "Welcome home," she murmured, and kissed her new daughter-in-law. "You're very pretty," she added, as she observed Margaret's blue eyes and raven hair, her diminutive figure in its fashionable gown.

"I hope we may stay with you, Mother," Charles said, and walked up the steps to the porch with one arm about her waist, his wife clinging to the other.

"Indeed, yes, for as long as you wish."

At the door Charles turned to Margaret. "This, my love, is a very special place to me. I hope you will become as fond of it as I am. My sisters and I grew up here, and our memories of those years are exceedingly happy ones."

With his acceptance of the Queenston house as a wedding gift, Charles insisted upon handling the collection of monies owed to his father, a step which Laura heartily commended and James permitted, grudgingly. The consequent improvement in his financial position contributed to the relaxation of his former tensions and renewed his energies, and he was able to assume his new duties with a vigour that surprised everyone.

When young Laura returned from Ingersoll with Mistress Sally they were quick to notice the change. "It is good to see you so happy, Papa," his daughter said as she kissed him. Young Laura had come home to fill her bride's chest. Dr. William Clark would follow in a few weeks, and if her father approved they would be married at Queenston.

"If she had remained at Ingersoll I would have given her everything a bride could need, but she insisted that only her mother could sew her wedding gown," Mistress Sally explained, her voice shrill and tremulous with fatigue.

Quickly Laura placed an arm about her stepmother's shoulders and led her to a chair. "Rest here while I make a pot of tea. I hope the journey hasn't overtaxed your strength, Mother. Thank you for taking such good care of our Laura. When you are rested you must tell me about this young man who wishes to marry her."

Mistress Sally was slow to recover from the journey. Invariably, she kept to her room until mid-day, and when she joined the others in the sitting room at tea time seemed tired and listless. Her former vivaciousness had disappeared and, beyond a mild excitement about the wedding gown that was taking shape under Laura's skilful fingers, she exhibited little interest in the daily happenings within the house. Laura thought she must be unwell and questioned her daughter about Mistress Sally's recent health. Had she been so quiet, so lacking

in energy before they left Ingersoll?

Preoccupied with her own plans, young Laura had not noticed that her grandmother seemed unusually quiet. She did not rise early when at home, but waited always until the servant had fetched her a cup of tea. No, young Laura did not think she was ill.

When Dr. Clark arrived Laura, unable to shrug off her concern, approached him with questions about Mistress Sally's health. Her fears were calmed by his reply. "I think Mrs. Ingersoll's heart is tired, although not unduly. You must realize that she is growing old, and the journey was a strenuous one for her. Try to protect her from excitement if you can. In my opinion, you have no need to be unusually concerned.

Laura and James took an immediate liking to William Clark; they found him an outgoing, friendly young man who fitted into their household as though he were an old friend. He agreed with young Laura's determination that the wedding must be a small, family affair, and her parents did not protest the decision. When asked if they planned a honeymoon William Clark shook his head. "A doctor rarely has time for a holiday. I'm afraid we'll have to get back to Ingersoll as soon as we can after we are married."

Mistress Sally also insisted upon returning home after young Laura's wedding. Her son Charles had been ill with a recurring fever at the time she and her granddaughter came to Queenston, and his failure to attend the wedding caused her some anxiety. He would have come if he had been well enough because he had promised to escort her back to Ingersoll, she said.

Unwilling to have her stepmother make the journey alone, Laura persuaded Jamie Dexter, who had come home from school to attend the wedding, to accompany her. When they set out from Queenston she thought Mistress Sally had recovered some of her former vitality. She smiled at Jamie's pleasantries as he tucked her into the carriage, waved her fingers airily in a gesture of farewell to Laura and James, and settled into her seat, prepared to enjoy the drive to Ancaster where they would board the stagecoach bound for Detroit which

would take them to Ingersoll. "Please see that she has a good room at the inn," Laura cautioned Jamie. "If it should be necessary to wait a day or so for the stage at Ancaster, I would like her to be as comfortable as possible."

Shortly after her daughter's wedding and Mistress Sally's departure, Laura moved to Chippawa to a house she had chosen because of its pleasant location. She could see the gently flowing Chippawa River from the windows of her sitting room, and during the summer months there would be roses in her garden, she said, and an abundance of wild raspberries beyond the vegetable plot.

She was alone when Mary Dexter and Jamie came from Queenston to tell her the sad news from Ingersoll. Upon Mistress Sally's return to her home she learned that Charles had died, a victim of cholera. At the news she had breathed a long sigh and crumpled to the floor.

While Jamie went down the road to the customs office to speak to James, Laura and Mary drew their chairs close to the sitting room fire. There was a hint of autumn in the sharpness of the wind that blew across the river, the rain beating against the windowpanes. Laura shivered, drew a shawl about her shoulders and hastened to fasten a door that had blown open. She paused for a moment at the window to watch the lowering sky and the writhing branches of the trees. When she turned toward Mary the tears ran down her cheeks. "Mistress Sally was a good mother to us," she said. "At the time she married my father our house was a sad, doleful place. She brought laughter and happiness into it. I think I began to love her when I saw the change in my father. My sisters and I respected her for the truths she taught us, and when we grew up she became our sincerely good friend. She and my father had a very good life together, and I can be reconciled to her death because I know how lonely she has been since he died. The news about Charles is more shocking. He had so much to live for, a loving wife and a growing family."

Mary's hand rested on Laura's shoulder for a moment in a gesture of affection. "I'm so sorry. I know how

deeply you cared for your brother.”

While she fumbled in the pocket of her dress for a handkerchief and wiped the tears from her face, Laura continued to talk about the past. “We were living at Great Barrington when Charles was born. I remember how I used to rock him in the cradle until he fell asleep. From the time my own mother died that cradle stood in a corner of the kitchen, and after Mistress Sally became our mother, as each new baby arrived I, being the eldest, was permitted to share in the care of the infant. Charles was scarcely six when James and I were married and I left my father’s house at Ingersoll to go to St. David’s to live. When I next saw him he had grown to manhood. Although I was sixteen years older than he I had a high regard for his opinion and have often sought his advice. There was a strong bond of affection between us. His death is a bitter blow to me.”

Chapter 30

Second Journey to the Thames

Laura felt no need to make new friendships during the first years of her residence at Chippawa. For the greater portion of the day James was engaged in the performance of his duties as collector of His Majesty's customs and she was content to be alone, care for her house, write letters to her daughters, and pore over the books her son Charles brought to her from Queenston. Often in the evening she listened silently to the conversations of those acquaintances of James who came to the house to talk over some of the political problems that had begun to beset the people of Upper Canada. The merits and disadvantages of the Family Compact and the growing unrest among the radicals were topics frequently discussed in the Secord sitting room. In a way, it was like the old prewar gatherings at Queenston, she thought, except that the Dexters, the Stephen Secords, Hamiltons, and Cartwrights were absent.

Mary and Robert Dexter, as well as certain others of their old friends drove from Queenston now and then to spend the night and take Sunday dinner with them. Laura looked forward to each of these visits as an especial event, made elaborate preparations for the comfort of their guests and the meals they would partake of together in an atmosphere of relaxation, laughter, and pleasant conversation.

She found, as time passed, that she sorely missed Mary Dexter's companionship. Their friendship had been a vital part of her life for many years, a close, lasting relationship that deepened as the months went by. They had shared each other's pleasures and sorrows, and the bond between them was constantly strengthened by the acknowledged need of each for the society of the other. Deprived now of that almost daily association with her friend, she felt no desire to cultivate new acquaintances.

Many of the long hours of spring and summer were spent in her garden. Under the elm tree, by the gate, her favourite wildflowers grew in abundance every spring, and in late June the walk to the porch was bordered on either side by neat rows of damask roses. Meticulously, she tended them and the plants she had transported from her Queenston garden, tall lilies the colour of clotted cream, cinnamon pinks, brilliant-hued candytuft. During the winter months, when the burden of her increasingly painful rheumatism permitted, knitting needles clicked busily as she fashioned garments for her grandchildren.

Although assured that Mary's girls were well provided for she sent gaily coloured toques and scarves to Ireland, and was rewarded with news-filled letters from her granddaughters, that sketched the daily pattern of their lives more fully than the hastily scrawled notes she received from their mother.

Harriet continued to live at St. Catharines, and accompanied by her children came often to Chippawa for brief, surprise visits. To Laura's delight, the girls were occasionally left in her care while Harriet and her husband travelled to York or Kingston or Montreal. Although aware that David Smith had become a well-to-do attorney at law and that Harriet was able to employ a seamstress to cut and sew the clothing her family required, Laura knit sweaters and mittens for the children because it gave her pleasure to do so.

Hannah, on the other hand, was constantly in need of garments for her offspring. A settler's wife, she wrote in letters to her mother, had little time for sewing and less money with which to purchase materials. Indeed,

her only source of supply was an infrequent peddler who travelled through the district now and then with bolts of cloth for sale along with beads, trinkets, and kitchen utensils. The colours were oddly assorted, she said, and the quality of the cloth poor for the price he demanded. Although Hannah did not mention her own needs, whenever Laura sent a box of children's clothing to Guelph she invariably added a small gift for her daughter, a frilled muslin apron, woollen petticoat, or knitted shawl.

Hannah's more recent letters had begun to cause her mother some anxiety. She imagined, as she endeavoured to read between the lines, that she could detect an unspoken wistfulness, a longing for something that was beyond her daughter's reach. She was uncertain whether it was a state of mind, caused by loneliness and lack of friendships in an area of scattered homesteaders, or a desire to participate again in the kind of social life that had meant so much to her when she was carefree and fun-loving in the days before her marriage. She had not seen Hannah since she and her husband had settled at Guelph. Was she really content with her life as the wife of a settler? Did she, perhaps unconsciously, envy her sisters their easier, more comfortable existence? That she loved her family Laura could not doubt. Each letter contained fond references to her husband, Hawley, his struggle to convert a two-hundred-acre grant of forested land into a profitable farm and told of her pride in the progress of their children at the log schoolhouse recently opened in the community. There had been an occasional gay report of some simple, happy event in which she and her family had participated, a sugaring-off party in the woods at maple syrup time, a corn roast before a blazing fire in the clearing in September. Of late, however, Hannah had made no mention of such lighthearted gatherings among the settlers who were her neighbours and Laura wondered about the omission. Unable to discover a logical reason for the vague uneasiness that plagued her when she read her daughter's letters, she sought James's advice. When she discovered that he, too, was disturbed by the tone of Hannah's lengthy communications, she wrote to suggest that her daughter and son-in-

law bring their children to Chippawa when the summer's crops had been harvested. She was confident that if they were together for a time she would be able to help her daughter resolve any problem that troubled her. She and James would, she wrote, be able to accommodate Hannah's family quite comfortably for the winter months unless Charlotte returned, which she thought unlikely.

While awaiting Hannah's reply she received a letter from young Laura who wrote that she was with child, that she and William Clark were ecstatically happy and wished her mother could be with her when the baby was born.

"You must go, my dear," James said, and when Laura demurred, reminded her that she had sat at Harriet's bedside when her children were delivered and Charlotte was sent to Guelph to be with Hannah at the time of her first confinement. "You will be happier if you are there. You must not worry about me. Bob will look after me while you are away."

"But if Hannah should come?"

"Hannah is our daughter. If she and her family arrive before you return she is quite capable of managing the household arrangements."

When Laura went to Ingersoll she carried in her portmanteau a layette of soft white flannel for the expected grandchild. Bob drove her over the portage road to Queenston to spend the night with Margaret and Charles who saw her safely on the stagecoach the following morning. Seated by the window of the vehicle, she observed the countryside with interest, remembering how the forest had encroached upon the trail over which she and her father rode under the guidance of Captain Brant's Indian chiefs on her first journey to the Thames. That narrow trail had in the meantime become a well-used thoroughfare. Many of the trees had vanished. Where once there had been forest she could see barns and farmhouses scattered here and there on the cleared land. More than forty years had elapsed since she and her father rode their horses over the winding cart path, past Brant's Ford, the sparkling Grand River, and on

through miles of virgin forest to the Thames. Now, when the driver pulled his horses to a stop with a loud 'Whoa' and announced that they had reached Ingersoll, she could scarcely believe the evidence of her eyes.

A thriving community stretched along either side of the river she remembered so well, and beyond the town the forest had receded almost to the horizon, having been replaced by fields of waving grain. Guided by her son-in-law, who had been waiting for her at the coach stop, she came to the log house that had been her first home in Upper Canada, and found it almost unrecognizable. The property of young Laura and her husband since Mistress Sally's death, it had been enlarged and new rooms had been added. Not until she stood beneath the oak tree in the shelter of which her father had read the marriage service for her and James was she certain that she had returned to her former home. With young Laura chattering happily at her side she walked about the grounds, scarcely listening, as she recalled those earlier days, Ma Davis's terse words of homely wisdom, and the good smell of old Mary's fresh baked bread cooling on the kitchen table. The outdoor oven stood behind the kitchen, as it had when she lived there, although it wore an appearance of disuse, and the ashes beneath the roasting spit had long since become a part of the soil. It would be absurd to expect that the house would have remained as it was when she first saw it, she reasoned. The times had changed. There was no need to use the old bake oven when there was a modern wood-burning stove in the kitchen, with an oven large enough to hold several loaves of bread and a leg of pork or venison.

In the area occupied in that earlier day by logs of wood intended for the fireplaces there stood an ugly unpainted structure which young Laura described as an ice house. "When thick ice forms on the river William intends to have blocks of it cut and stored here. It is said that if it is well packed in sawdust from the mill in town, the ice will remain frozen all through the summer months. We intend to build a box in the food cellar that will be large enough to hold a block of the ice, and when the weather is warm we shall keep any perishable victu-

als in it. Our baby will be less vulnerable to summer sickness if his food is stored in the box."

Laura returned to Chippawa within a few days of the birth of young Laura's daughter, having left mother and child in the care of Ma Davis. Too old to act as midwife, Ma had begged to be allowed to care for the infant until young Laura was fully recovered. Since Mistress Sally's death she had been living with Laura's sister-in-law, Anna Ingersoll, who was, she said, as fine a Christian woman as ever lived, but there was no humour in her. "'Tis a sad house I live in, Miss Laura. I don't want to sound ungrateful, but to tell the truth I'll be glad to stay with the Doctor and young Laura. Miss Anna has no need of me. She feels it her duty to give me a home because Mr. Charles would have wished it, and I'm thankful to her for that, though I could wish it were a livelier place. She has never ceased to mourn her husband's death, and I don't believe she ever will. I wish she could see how bad it is for her children to live in a home where there is no laughter, and little talk. Poor dears! They've become too quiet since their father passed away."

It had been good to see Ma Davis again, Laura thought, as she sat in the coach on the homeward journey and remembered how the older woman had wept when they met. Through her tears she had reminded Laura that she had not seen her since the time of her father's death. Old now, her shoulders bent, her pace slower than in earlier years, she remained alert and more active than many younger women. Laura felt assured that Ma would give her daughter the confidence she needed in the first weeks of motherhood.

Her visit had been shortened by a disturbing letter from James. Hannah had written him to say that her husband was seriously ill, the doctor held little hope for his recovery, and James intended to ask Charles to determine what could be done. Laura hoped she might reach Chippawa in time to accompany him to Guelph. Plagued by feelings of guilt because she had not realized that Hannah's problems were so severe and because she had not gone to visit her before making the journey to Ingersoll, she desired to make amends as quickly as possi-

ble. If her husband were desperately ill Hannah would need her mother's support.

When she reached Chippawa she found that it would be impossible for her to make the journey to Guelph. An epidemic of smallpox had begun to spread through the Niagara peninsula and a number of the villagers had been stricken. James, recovering from vaccination against the disease, insisted that she be vaccinated immediately. While still nauseous from the effects of the treatment, she learned that Bob had contracted the smallpox. Censuring the doctor who had refused to treat the black man while so many others in the village were in need of the life saving vaccine, she staggered from her bed to fetch broth to his cabin, bathe the wrinkled, weather-beaten face and nurse him through sickness and delirium until the infection had run its course.

Chapter 31

Widowhood

It was their son Charles who brought word to Laura and James of the uprising at York, the half-hearted battle at Montgomery's Tavern, and the escape of the rebel ringleader, William Lyon Mackenzie.

James shook his fist in anger as Charles related the story. "I knew the villain would cause trouble sooner or later. I was convinced of it the first time I talked with him. I liked neither his spoken views nor the articles he printed in that rag of a paper."

Some years earlier, while the Secords resided at Queenston, William Lyon Mackenzie had set up his printing press in their community and begun to publish articles that James and other Loyalists considered traitorous. James had more than once, he said, taken issue with him regarding his politics, accused him of seditious utterings and, when the stocky little man with the fanatical eyes and haggard face moved his printing-presses to York, James was relieved. Now, as Charles described Mackenzie's abortive plan to seize York, with a rebel following, the encounter at Montgomery's Tavern, and his consequent escape, James's anger was roused again. When Charles recounted the method of his flight to Niagara, aided by friends along the way who dressed him in women's clothing and furnished him with a rowboat in which to cross to the American side of the river, the col-

our in James's face rose to a deep red and he paced the floor with limping steps. His fists clenched and eyes flashing, he muttered invectives under his breath until Laura feared he might suffer an attack of apoplexy. "The Governor must stamp out this rebellion at once, before it leads to war," he said, at last.

When William Lyon Mackenzie had gathered a thousand or more ill-assorted men along the American border, he returned to the Canadian side of the Niagara River to camp on Navy Island in full view of the inhabitants of Chippawa. Although seven batteries from the shore near Chippawa bombarded the island at intervals the intruders were not dislodged. Each day, a small ship, the *Caroline*, put out from the American shore, steamed up the river to Navy Island with food supplies and guns for the would-be conquerors while James and his friends grew more and more incensed. At a meeting in the Secord sitting room on Christmas Eve, they roundly criticized the Lieutenant-Governor for his lack of initiative and pondered the idea of taking matters into their own hands.

"The *Caroline* must be got rid of. If we can eliminate their supplies, if the rebels are unable to get food, they will decamp soon enough," James insisted, his voice loud with anger, as Laura proffered hot toddies to his friends.

Charles who, with Margaret had come to spend Christmas with them, warned, "We daren't risk it, Father, although I agree it would be the surest way to dispose of the rogues."

Less than a week later, while the inhabitants of Chippawa slept in their beds, the *Caroline* made her last voyage, floating over the Falls in the river in a mass of flames. Jamie Dexter brought the news to James and Laura on New Year's Day. Members of the militia, led by a naval officer, had crossed the river to Fort Schlosser, driven the crew from the *Caroline*, unloosed her from her moorings, towed her into the current, set her afire, and returned to the Canadian shore before anyone on either side was aware of what had happened.

When the small boats began to leave Navy Island and move toward the American shore, James and Laura

watched them from the windows of the customs office. "I trust this is the last we shall hear of that rabble," James said angrily.

His hope was not realized. From time to time supporters of Mackenzie crossed to the Canadian side of the river to make sporadic raids on the homes of citizens. The Anglican church at Chippawa was set afire and a resident of the village murdered before the attacks ceased.

When the monument, erected at Queenston in memory of Sir Isaac Brock, was destroyed the following spring, reputedly by the rebels, angry Loyalists, James among them, hurried to the spot to determine the extent of the damage. At a meeting held at Queenston in July to make plans for the reconstruction of the monument, James's anger was roused to a dangerous pitch by the remarks of one of the men present. Trembling with rage he left the meeting in the company of Charles, who endeavoured to soothe his temper as he drove him back to Chippawa. While relating the details of the meeting to Laura the following day he denounced the man who had spoken so harshly of the great expense that would be involved in the erection of a new monument. Laura listened to his angry words, and as she pleaded with him to be calm, saw the blood rush to his face in a dark red stain. The torrent of words ceased, suddenly, and he collapsed at her feet, stricken by an attack of apoplexy.

Summoned in haste, the village doctor pronounced his verdict with brutal frankness. It was unlikely that James would recover, although he might live for an indefinite period in his paralysed condition, he said. Whether or not he would regain consciousness was unpredictable.

Charles hurried from Queenston upon receipt of Laura's urgent message, accompanied by Dr. Spencely whose diagnosis was similar, if somewhat less blunt than that of the Chippawa physician. James should not be left alone, he said. She must watch carefully for any sign of returning consciousness and be ready to reassure him if he awakened to an awareness of his condition and became apprehensive. When the Doctor suggested that she engage a woman to assist her, she shook her head.

Bob had ministered to his master for many years, and although less alert and slower to move since his illness, would be able to perform any necessary tasks. While Dr. Spencely gave her little hope, his visit cheered her. If her life with James was nearing an end, she would make the most of the time that was left and care for him as tenderly as if he were wholly aware of her ministrations. At times, when she bathed his face and wiped beads of perspiration from his brow, she was certain there was a glimmer of intelligence in the staring eyes, and hastened to whisper words of endearment in his ear and run her fingers through his steel-gray hair in a gesture of affection.

Harriet came from St. Catharines to assist in nursing her father, and after a week had elapsed Laura suggested that she return to her family. Her children would need their mother's attention, she said. She could not tell her daughter that she found her presence distracting and preferred to be alone with James during these last days.

When Charles insisted that Charlotte must be brought home from Ireland, Laura refused to allow him to summon her. Charlotte was happy with Mary, and must not be made to feel that because she was the unmarried daughter her first duty was to her parents. There was nothing she could do for her father that was not already being done, she insisted.

A long, despairing letter from Hannah, the first in many weeks, which told of her husband's death and the struggle to maintain an existence in the isolated community in which they lived, added to Laura's anxieties. Her heart ached for Hannah and she wished that some means of helping her could be found. Hannah was so young to have lost her husband, too inexperienced and overwrought to be able to cope with the problems his death appeared to have presented. By comparison, her own situation seemed less distressing. She and James had reached an age where death could be expected, and she had a lifetime of memories to sustain her, while Hannah's span of marital happiness was far too brief. A year earlier she would have been able to talk with James, and between them a plan to aid her daughter could have

been devised. Now, with her husband lying inert and silent, she could only hope that Charles might be able to lend assistance to Hannah.

The weeks lengthened into months as Laura tended James, hovering over him hour after hour. Buoyed by the fact that he seemed aware, occasionally, of her presence, she talked gently to him as she smoothed his pillows, sat at his bedside with his unresponsive hand clasped in hers, and related items of news about their children or read a letter from Mary or Charlotte. When relieved of her vigil by Bob, she often left the sick room to cry, uncontrollably, in the privacy of her bedroom. She rarely slept in her bed. More often than not, she lay across it briefly, fully clothed, or dozed in a chair in her husband's room, starting up at any unexpected sound.

Mary Dexter often stayed overnight with her, and eventually persuaded Laura to engage a woman from the village to care for her house, tend the garden, and relieve Bob of certain household duties. Bob could no longer be depended upon to perform tasks other than those related to his master's needs. When Mary suggested his replacement Laura refused to consider it. He had been a member of her household for too many years to be able to adjust to other surroundings. For as long as he lived she would give him shelter, be responsible for his welfare. It was little enough to do for so loyal a servant, she said.

For more than six months Laura kept her vigil, watched and waited for an occasional real or imagined moment of awareness in James's eyes. In her heart, she knew that death alone would release him from the prison of his body, and when he died she was, in a sense, relieved that the end had come. In death there was a dignity that had been denied him in these last months of illness.

In accordance with his wishes she arranged for his burial at Lundy's Lane, among the many friends who had fallen during the war with the Yankees. From the window of the carriage in which she sat with Margaret and Charles, she watched the pallbearers place his coffin in the winter burying house, and when the vehicle was turned about and they drove toward Chippawa she won-

dered, dully, how she would fill the days that loomed endlessly ahead.

The friends, who had formed the funeral procession to Lundy's Lane and returned to partake of the refreshments set out for them by Laura's neighbours, had gone their several ways when Mary Dexter placed an arm about her friend's shoulders, stroked the whitened hair, and led her to a chair by the fire. "You must rest now. You will be very tired," she said.

Laura wiped tears from her eyes, and shivered as she drew a wrap closer about her shoulders. "I'm weary, yes. I feel helpless, confused, uncertain about the future. During our years together, James and I were agreed that we had an obligation to make the best possible use of each day allotted to us. James possessed great inner strength, some of which he was able to impart to me. He taught me to have confidence in myself, gave me the courage to meet almost any trial or emergency. With him beside me it seemed a simple matter to use well the days and years that stretched before us. Now that he has gone I seem to have lost my direction. I can see no further purpose that I need to fulfil. When my mother died I was eight years old, and I wanted to die too. That is how I feel now. I have no incentive to go on living. Pray for me, Mary! Pray God to give me the courage I shall need to find my way again, and go on alone for as long as He wills. I am sixty-six years old. Surely my time to die will be upon me soon!"



Laura Secord, artist unknown, in the collection of the Public Archives of Canada, C-10717.

Chapter 32

Epilogue

On an afternoon in late October, in the year 1868, a funeral cortege moved slowly along the winding road from Chippawa to Lundy's Lane. In the distance, the ridge that stretched toward Queenston was masked by a purple haze. A golden light lay over the near fields, and muted rays of sunshine filtered through overhanging trees to gleam against the trappings on the hearse that bore Laura Ingersoll Secord to her resting place in the Lundy's Lane cemetery.

It was a brief procession, a dozen vehicles at most, her son Charles, sober and erect, unruly gray hair protruding beneath his silk hat; Charlotte, no longer young, and Harriet in her widow's black; Jamie Dexter, his wife and daughter; several relatives, a few neighbours. One or two dignitaries from the Niagara peninsula were present to pay their last respects to the woman whose gallant attempt to save her country in the summer of 1813 had gone unnoticed at the time because of her desire for anonymity. In latter years the story of her journey to Beaver Dams had been widely publicized, and she had come to be regarded as a heroine of the war with the Yankees.

Twenty-seven years earlier the body of her husband, James, had been carried along the same road to the Lundy's Lane burial grounds. In the intervening years Laura, alone in her house at Chippawa, had known sorrow,

bereavement, loneliness, poverty. The personal pension for which she applied at the time of his death had been refused, and without James's salary and war pension the slender resources with which she had been left were stretched to the limit to maintain her home and provide food and clothing.

Through the years she had carried on a frequent and lively correspondence with each of her daughters, while they lived, although she rarely saw them. Charles, on the other hand, visited her regularly. Time after time, he urged her to dispose of the Chippawa house and return to Queenston to be a part of his family, and as often as he made the offer she refused it. Instinctively, she knew that what she wanted most was to preserve her independence, and in order to do so was forced to live more and more frugally as the weeks and months went by. She was quite content to remain at Chippawa. Those neighbours who rallied round her at the time of her husband's illness had become her friends, although she continued to hold herself aloof from them in many ways. The children of the neighbourhood were her most welcome visitors. Bringing delicacies from their mothers' kitchens, they lingered to weed her garden in summer, shovel the snow from the porch in winter, and listened often to her stories of the war with the Yankees or descriptions of her early life at Great Barrington in Massachusetts.

Although she had, at the time of her husband's death, confessed to confusion of mind, and doubt about her future role, she regained her courage gradually as the months passed. The rule by which she endeavoured to live throughout her adult years stood her in good stead in her time of sorrow. Memory of the swiftness with which James had been stricken caused her to be grateful each day for her own continuing health and gave her an added inner strength which sustained her as family and contemporaries, one by one, passed away, leaving her more and more lonely.

Jamie Dexter, who at the time of his marriage had settled at Chippawa, was a source of great joy to her in the long years of her widowhood, and she was often heard to say that if he were her son he could not be more

kind or thoughtful of her needs. A daily visitor, he was her chief informant about events of local or wider interest. Disciplined by her husband's opinions, she had long ago become Loyalist in her convictions as she developed an interest in public affairs, and after his death continued to derive considerable pleasure from lively discussions of politics with Jamie, or her son Charles.

Interest in the events of the war of 1812-1814 was revived as the years went by, and as the details of various battles were disclosed the story of Laura's walk to Beaver Dams was revealed. One day, in the summer of 1853, a journalist knocked at her door. He explained that he was seeking information about her contribution to the victory at Beaver Dams to be used in a series of war articles he planned to write. Without the fear of reprisals which had earlier sealed her lips, she talked freely of her frightening experiences in the Black Swamp and the beechwoods during the journey to Beaver Dams. When the *Anglo-American Magazine*, in its November issue that year, carried her story, together with a letter from Colonel James Fitzgibbon which vouched for the authenticity of it, residents of the Niagara peninsula began to seek her out to express their feelings of pride and gratitude. Eager to do her honour they would, belatedly, have made her a celebrity had she not declined. In the years immediately following the war, with James at her side to give her confidence, she might have been pleased and flattered to accept the proffered gestures of pride in her achievement had the story been disclosed then. At the age of seventy-eight, she preferred the quiet existence to which she had become accustomed.

When Edward, Prince of Wales, visited the Niagara peninsula while on a tour of Canada in 1860, he learned of her brave deed from those eager to do honour to distinguished citizens of their community. In a gesture of appreciation, Prince Edward made her a gift of one hundred pounds, although she protested that her act was neither heroic nor spectacular. She had merely done her duty.

She came to Upper Canada within a year or so of the formation of the province, and during the seventy-three

years of her life within its borders had seen productive farms emerge from a wilderness, towns and cities spring from hamlets and villages. In the year before her death a confederation of colonies had been formed, a constitution written, and an infant nation launched on its journey toward maturity. Alert to the end of her life, interested always in the affairs of her country, she insisted upon having the details of the union of the four provinces explained to her. She talked, proudly, to Charles and Jamie of Upper Canada's growth and development during her years of residence in the Niagara peninsula, remembering that her brother-in-law, Richard Cartwright, had predicted a bright future for their country.

At ninety-three, she continued to rise each morning, perform her simple household tasks, somewhat more slowly than in earlier years but with a meticulousness instilled in her by her stepmother, Mistress Sally. Although her shoulders were bent, hands stiff and gnarled by the painful rheumatism to which she had been subjected in later years, she continued to work in her flower garden when the weather permitted. During the last summer of her life she was rewarded by an unusual profusion of bloom that gave her infinite pleasure.

No tears were shed by those who stood near as the casket was removed from the hearse, although Harriet was seen to wipe her eyes gently, with a lace-edged handkerchief, and Charles's face was set in a stern line. Those of her contemporaries who might have mourned for her had long since been dead. Instead, there was a look of solemn pride in the faces of those who formed a circle around the newly dug grave as the clergyman pronounced the familiar words of the burial service. Certain of the men and women present had been among those who, as children, listened to her stories of the war with the Yankees. The account of her walk to Beaver Dams had been told and retold many times in the intervening years, and differing versions of it were spread to areas far removed from the Niagara peninsula until she emerged as an undoubted heroine to the people who heard it. The image of a frail, timid housewife braving the terrors of the Black Swamp and the possible conse-

quences of apprehension by the enemy, to carry a vital message to the British stirred the imagination and warmed the heart of every man to whom the story was told, and brought tears to the eyes of many women.

Although more than one hundred years have passed since her death, children and adults are still thrilled by her story. Her tale of bravery and heroism continues to be recounted.

Genealogy

Thomas Ingersoll 1749-1812 m Elizabeth Dewey 1775 1758-1784	Laura 1775-1868 m James Secord Elizabeth 1779-1811 m Reverend Daniel Pickett Mira 1781-1847 m Julius Hitchcock Abigail 1783-1821 m Guy Woodsworth	Laura Ingersoll 1775-1868 m James Secord 1773-1841	Mary m Dr. William Trumbull Charlotte unmarried Harriet m David William Smith Hannah m Hawley William (died) m Edward Carthew Laura m Dr. William Clark (died) m Captain John Poore Charles m Margaret Robins Appoloni unmarried
Thomas Ingersoll m Mercy Smith 1785	no issue		
Thomas Ingersoll m Sarah Whiting Backus 1789	Charles 1791-1832 m Anna Merritt Charlotte 1793 m Mr. Marigold Appy 1794-1872 m Mr. Carroll Thomas 1796-1847 Samuel 1798-1861 James 1801-1886 m Catharine McNab Sarah 1807-1826 m Henry Mittlebergher		

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Helen Caister Robinson

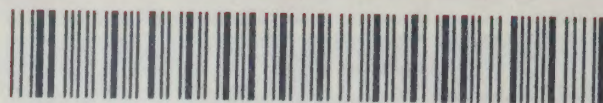
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Mrs. Robinson's special writing interest is making both Canadian history and natural history come alive for young adult readers, and *Laura* reflects that interest.

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The Globe and Mail

Front cover: Meeting of Laura Secord and Lieutenant Fitzgibbon, an oil painting by Lorne K. Smith, in the collection of the Public Archives of Canada, C-11053. Detail.